

MAX UNDERSTOOD

By
Nancy Carlin and Michael Rasbury

"Nothing in life is to be feared.
It is only to be understood"
Marie Curie

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Max Understood is an invitation into the life of a 7 year-old boy with autism. As Max embarks on a transformative odyssey beyond the confines of his parents' apartment, his unique perspective reveals the beauty and mystery of the world around him. Paving the way is a leaf-blowing philosopher, a string theorist, Pegasus, a mermaid, and all the presidents of the United States. This musical for seven actors is created with sound design as integral to the music and script. We are attempting to find a new form of music-theater. And to represent and contextualize an abstract but recognizable experience (living with autism) to a growing number of theatre audiences.

MAX UNDERSTOOD COMPACT DISC TRACK LISTING:

1. Noise Symphony
2. Meet Max and Machine
3. Negativity
4. Why Can't I Be Normal (Underscore)
5. Ribbon
6. Kids and Cars
7. Shape Your World
8. Dream
9. Reaching
10. Rushed Up
11. Why Can't I Be Normal (Underscore)
12. His Name Is Max
13. Press A Button
14. Cloud
15. Powerful Powerlines
16. Get Clear
17. Casio Poetry
18. Poetry and The Water
19. This Is Normal
20. President Machine End

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN:

Max, 7 years old. Autistic, big eyes, angelic, uncoordinated, jumps and flaps, is an escape artist, an obsessive compulsive, extremely bright, trapped behind the wall of his disorder. Surprisingly sweet singing voice.

Mom, his mom, 30-ish. Trying not to buckle under the weight of her stresses, searching for her son, her lost self, and her off-course marriage. Soprano.

Dad, his dad, 30-ish. Bewildered at the life he finds himself in, trying to do right, searching for his son, his lost self, and his off-course marriage. Baritone.

Homunculus "**Munc**" Jones, a gardener, a philosopher, a spirit-guide. The guy with the leaf blower. Wise, gentle, practical, magical. Unusual gravitas. Baritone

Fin, a girl, a little older than Max. Bossy, powerful, then sweet and lyrical. A misunderstood bully who needs a friend. Soprano.

Albert, a boy, 12-14. Book-ish, awkward, then cuts loose. Probably an Asperger's kid. Unusually smart, happy to rattle off facts and lists. His inner hip-hop artist waiting to get out. Baritone. Can rap.

Peg, a girl, 12-14. Heavy-set, into clothes. Teased about her weight, but secretly, she can fly! Alto or mezzo-soprano.

Note: the three kids, Fin, Albert, and Peg could be played by adults. Max should always be played by a real kid.

PLACE:

An apartment complex. The interior of Max's apartment and various exterior locations immediately surrounding it.

SCENE 1 - HOME

We find a boy standing by himself surrounded by darkness. He stands still but there is a noticeable inner fire burning brightly and ready to surge out of every area of his body. This is Max. His eyes are gleaming and wide open and far away and he wears a very large smile.

SONG 1 (CD TRACK 1): NOISE SYMPHONY

Loud sound of a leaf blower breaks the mood. It underscores the coming sounds.

Somewhere in the darkness a telephone rings. Max doesn't notice.

Then a microwave begins beeping from the opposite side of the stage. Again, Max is far away.

Other household and neighborhood sounds begin to randomly make noise.

Max still doesn't seem to notice, but he seems distracted. Although his eyes remain full and his smile bright, he begins shifting his hands in uncomfortable ways.

From the darkness around him, the cacophony of sounds begins to overlap and grow.

He starts making an ever growing and anxious sounding vocalization.

MAX

Noisy!

Max flaps his hands harder and faster, and his vocalization sounds even more anxious. But he still smiles and seems far away. The anxious sound is really pleasing for him to make.

The symphony of noise culminates in a clattering and electronic sounding crescendo. Max stops shaking. In a brief second, and as the reverberations of the noise symphony fade, we see Max's happy smile and distant eyes.

Max always looks happy while he replays stories in his mind.

Max grabs his president machine. The tinny, digital sound of a talking toy giving facts about presidents brings focus to the present space.

SONG 2 (CD TRACK 2): MEET MAX AND MACHINE

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Welcome to an interactive visit with the U.S. Presidents.
Press any button to begin...
Pr...Pr...Pr...President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the thirteenth president from 1850-1853.

He rapidly presses the buttons preventing the machine from completing its sentences.

Mom appears. She holds a box of toaster waffles.

MOM

Max!

There is no response to this, as Max continues with his toy.

Dad appears in a separate space

DAD

Max?

He holds a toaster.

MOM/DAD
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL

PRESIDENT MACHINE
Pr...Pr...Pr...President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the thirteenth president from 1850-1853. Fillmore is a member of the Whig Party.

MOM
Breakfast!

Sound of toaster ejecting toast.

SCENE 2 - HOME

Max sits on floor eating waffles and stimming (hands flapping, etc.) Television light illuminates his face. Sound of Ray Bolger in The Wizard of Oz saying, "...but some people without brains do an awful lot of talking..." Max has some of his favorite icons with him. Of particular interest is a little white Pegasus. He often uses it as a character to reenact stories in his mind.

With the remote control, Max continually repeats a sequence.

TV
"... but how can you talk if you haven't got a brain? I don't know, but some people without brains do an awful lot of talking, don't they?"

Dad and Mom enter with coffee.

MOM
That incessant leaf blower woke me up ag--

DAD
Max, you wake up way too early in --

MAX
I watch Wizard.

MOM
And go to bed too late. Did you -

MAX
Wizard!

MOM
...get any...? --

DAD
I slept with Max. But he kept me --

MAX
(with the TV, for the umpteenth
time)
"..an awful lot of talking!"

DAD
He won't sleep without one of us there.

MOM
Can't that guy just take a break from relocating the leaves?
This is the noisiest apartment -- --

DAD
You can't watch this over and over --

MOM
One of us is always alone --

MAX
Why?

DAD
You know he needs someone to --

MAX
Why?

DAD
(gently, to Max)
Because it's just too much.

MAX
Why?

DAD
Because you have this memorized.

MOM
This is getting old --

MAX
WHY?
DAD
BECAUSE I CAN'T --
MOM
What?
DAD
I can't watch this one more time!
MAX
WHY!?
DAD
I CAN'T TAKE THIS!
Dad turns off the TV. Max's eyes roll up in his head and stay fixated on an imaginary TV screen. He flaps.
Mom and Dad pause to look at him.
I'll be late again if I don't --
MAX
I watch!
DAD
I can't be late --
MAX
I watch Wizard.
MOM
You have to get up in the morning when he does.--
MAX
I watch Brian Williams!
MOM
That's what I have to do.
MAX
Brian Williams!
DAD
No more TV, Max. I WAS UP EVERY HOUR WITH HIM UNTIL --

MAX
Be happy!

DAD
No more!

MAX
Need to, need to, need to!

Descends into a fit.

DAD
OK stop, Ok. Just until you get dressed. But then we're turning it off.

MAX
Need to watch!

DAD
We'll watch while your getting dressed.

MOM
We can't keep letting him--

MAX
(sharply)
Who was Millard Fillmore?

DAD
You have to pick your (battles)--

MAX
WHO WAS MILLARD FILLMORE?

MOM
Well, you should stick to your-- You know, Max.

MAX
You know.

MOM
YOU know.

DAD
But when you're through getting dressed, we're turning it off. (to Mom) It seems to comfort him sometimes. It really does--

MAX
Maybe later I watch?

MOM
I could have slept with him --

DAD
What?

MOM
I don't sleep anyway.

MAX
Maybe tomorrow I watch?

DAD
OK...But no more Wizard. Your favorite commercial is on this channel.

He turns it on to a morning news show.

MOM
Just for a little while. But when you're dressed --

MAX
Maybe later?

MOM
We'll watch again later.

Max starts organizing Dad's hair.

MAX
Maybe tomorrow I watch?

DAD
OK, Max.

More hair organizing. Dad tries to ignore.

MOM
You know, I'm worried about us.

MAX
Like Brian Williams!

DAD
What do you suggest --.

MAX
Brian Williams!

MOM
(Getting clothes for Max)
We're stuck --

DAD
We're doing the best we --

MAX
Makes you look like Brian Williams! Like Good Squid! Good Squid!

MOM
And we have no friends.

DAD
The people in this town drive me (nuts)--

MOM
Who'd last five minutes with us?

DAD
I mean all they care about is their leaf-blown sidewalks.

MAX
Good Squid!

MOM
Same leaves. New location.

MAX
Like Brian Williams!

DAD
We need friends...

MAX
Good Day, and Good Squid.

MOM
(to Dad)
What?!

DAD
Brian Williams. When he was on Sesame Street. He said, "Good Day and Good Squid."

They pause a moment. They almost smile.

MAX

(in an echoalic way, some words
sound incorrect)

"President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the
'firthteenth' president from 1850-1853."

DAD

That's great...Hold on Max, just a sec.

Gets his work stuff together

DAD

We need to get him out more.

MAX

(begging a response)

Cornish Pixies...

DAD

He really needs the sunlight.

MAX

(more insistent)

Cornish Pixies...

DAD

(to Max, responding by rote)

"FRESHLY PLUCKED."

Max presses his toe on a little Casio
keyboard. It plays a melody.

DAD

You should take him out more.

MOM

YOU try. It's too frustrating. You know he bumps into people.

DAD

I'm not sure he even wants to. Hey, Max, you want to go
outside?

MAX

Mmm-hmmm.

MOM

Hey Max, are you a monkey wrench?

MAX

Mmm-hmmm.

DAD
(point taken)

Ok...

MOM

If he was just a little more aware of his body...

DAD

People will just have to deal.

Mom turns the Casio off.

Dad goes off.

Mom takes a deep breath. She dresses Max as she has to every morning. These are the same clothes he is fixated on and must wear every day.

MOM

Max, you've got to always stay close to Mom.

Max turns Casio on

Remember, if you do want to go outside -- tell me. (trying to catch his eye) Where are you Max? Let me see your pretty eyes. You know, there are bad people in -- If you left without me, some bad person...You have to pay attention outside.(calling to Dad) GET ME A DAMP WASHCLOTH...

She turns Casio off

MAX

That wasn't in the job description!

Max turns Casio back on. Melody again.

MOM

...Cars not looking out for kids in the way...the drainage ditch has no cover on it.

DAD

You worry too much.

Trying to turn Casio off

No, Max.

MAX

Sponge Bob...ummm...ummm...ummmm....

MOM

He's not capable.

DAD

Where's the stop button on this thing?

Casio off

MAX

(he struggles with some of the words)

Sponge Bob and Drake Bell and, and, and Pegasus and Princess and, and, and Ben Stein and ummmm, ummmm, ummm, Pee Wee can come to my house and have triple chocolate power line cake with a red candle and a green, no, no, no, blue candle and red candle. OK?

DAD

Well, OK Max, but I'm not sure that can really --

MAX

Why?

Dad doesn't know how to respond.

Why?

DAD

Because --

MAX

Why?

DAD

Because you --

MAX

Why? (beat) Why?

MOM

Yesterday he smacked into some man at the store. The guy looked at me like I was such a bad par -- hold still Max!

Running away to do Dad's hair.

DAD
(grabbing his hand firmly)
Please leave my hair alone.

MOM
They expect him to act different at his age.

DAD
Please! Stop!

MOM
People don't understand.

DAD
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

MAX
Brian Williams!

DAD
Pay attention!

Turning his face to catch his eyes and
repeating the oft heard phrase

Where are you Max? Over here, handsome.

MOM
Here, I'll do it.

Giving Mom the wet washcloth which she
proceeds to use to wipe Max's hair.

DAD
Max, just make sure you get Mom and Dad if you want to go
out.

MOM
What happens when we're not around for him anymore?

DAD
What do you mean?

MOM
When he's old.

MAX
(vocalizing his anxious sounds
and flapping)
Because I'm...dirty! Because he doesn't know!

MOM
He'll be a teenager soon. What's the matter Max?

MAX
Noisy!

This gentle washing feels like bricks
on his skin. He lashes out and hits
Mom.

MOM
Ouch!

DAD
Easy.

Max's hand gets caught in Mom's locket
chain, almost choking her

MOM
Let go!

Dad undoes the necklace

DAD
Why'd you do that, Max? Try to be more careful. Pay
attention!

MAX
Can I rip that? Can I hurt that?

DAD
That was not a good choice.

MAX
Be happy!

DAD
I know you didn't want to hurt Mom.

MAX
Be happy!

MOM

I'm all right.

DAD

How are we ever going to get that boy in a bathtub? Water freaks him out so much.

MOM

One step at a--

Max is all at once overcome by agitated remorse, moaning and shaking. Tears.

DAD

All done! "Noisy" all done.

We love you...

A dressing ritual/game. Max follows directions in order to dress. Mom and Dad take a deep breath. Dad turns casio on.

MOM

"Two steps to the left."

DAD

"Peek round the bend." You're a very special boy.

MOM

"Under the hedge."

DAD

"Over the top." Other people don't understand you like we do.

MOM

"Half step again."

DAD

"One to the right."

MOM

"A step at a time..."

DAD

"And your day will be bright."

MOM

That's right!

They dare to believe they've accomplished something. Max suddenly starts to pull his shirt off. He doesn't like how it feels.

MOM/DAD

No!!

They try unsuccessfully to put his shirt back on.

Be still!

MAX

(making fashion model poses)

Like Abercrombie! Like Abercrombie! With your camera!

DAD

Not right now, Max.

MAX

Maybe later we play Abercrombie?

DAD

Maybe later. (to Mom) I have to go! I'm really behind.

He starts off, but gets caught back up

MAX

(like Pee Wee)

Oh, hi! Today's secret word is fun! Now, you know what to do when anyone says the secret word, right?

MOM/DAD

(not fully committed, but trying. Fake smiles)

Scream?

MAX

That's right! Let's try it! Are you, um, fit...no, fat?

MOM

No, I'm fun.

MOM/DAD/MAX

Ahhhhhh!

MOM

(turning casio off)

I don't know how I'm going to finish all the--

MAX
Powerful power lines.

DAD
You always seem to manage.

MAX
Powerful power lines.

MOM
Barely.

MAX
Powerful power lines are like dogs!

DAD
(Handing Mom the locket)
Max, wouldn't Mom have more fun if she took you to the --

No response
More FUN?

MAX
Ahhhhhh!

MOM/DAD
(joining in for a good tension-
releasing scream)
Ahhhhhh.

TV sounds suddenly louder.

TV NEWS
The problem is really societal.

Dad goes to watch.

TV NEWS
We've been engaging in a mythology for a long time. A thing
called "See and Avoid".

MAX
Theodore?...Simon?...Alvin and the Chipmunks?...

TV NEWS
...and we really don't have that much visual range and it's
very easy to approach each other and neither of them see
anything...

MAX
Richard Nixon and the Presidents?
(in the same intonation as Dave
would yell to his chipmunk,
"Al-vin!!!!")
Nix-on!!!

Commercial comes on, intro

DAD
Max, it's the commercial!

Max turns excitedly toward the TV. Mom
and Dad know they have 30 seconds to
get something done.

SONG 3 (CD TRACK 3): NEGATIVITY

TV
With Nutri-scheme you can lose weight while you eat. Tanya
lost 30 pounds while eating. TANYA: I'm 47 years old and
haven't looked this good since high school. My husband calls
me his trophy wife!

Watching Max watch the commercial

MOM
How do you explain that? His obsessions are so bizarre.

DAD
What, don't all kids visit power lines every day?

MOM
Lose weight while you eat?

Max engages happily, as trio for Mom,
Dad, and TV begins.

MOM
THIS IS REAL
THAT IS NOT
DON'T COMPARE
I AM STUCK

STUCK IN THIS
IT'S FOR LIFE
THEY CAN'T KNOW

STUCK, STUCK, STUCK

DAD

LOOK AT US
I'LL ADMIT
I'VE CHECKED OUT
JUST TO COPE

PARALYZED
MY MIND'S FRIED

MOM

STUCK, STUCK, STUCK
STUCK, STUCK, STUCK

TV

THE PROBLEM IS REALLY SOCIETAL

MOM

Here you go, Sweetie Pie

TV

A THING CALLED SEE AND AVOID

DAD

Let's put this shirt on

TV

THE PROBLEM IS THEIR BLIND SPOTS

MOM

There ya go.

TV

AND NEITHER OF THEM SEE ANYTHING

MOM

We'll do Abercrombie later.

TV

THEY DON'T DEAL IN BLAME
BLAME, BLAME, BLAME, BLAME

DAD

WISH I COULD
MAKE IT GOOD
GONE SO WRONG
CAN'T REPAIR

PARALYZED
MY MIND'S FRIED

FRIED, FRIED, FRIED

MOM
STUCK, STUCK, STUCK

DAD
FRIED

MOM
STUCK

TV
BLAME

DAD
FRIED

MOM
STUCK

TV
BLAME

DAD
FRIED

MOM
STUCK

TV
BLAME

Dad clicks the TV off. And exits.
Everything stops.

MOM
Max, sit here and play with your Presidents. I'll go fold the
laundry. Max, you and Pegasus want to fold laundry with me?

She gets no response
Max?

No response
It's "fun"...

MAX

Ahhhhh!

MOM

You don't want to fold laundry?

No response

If you change your mind, I'm right over here.

She goes over to the adjacent laundry area.

On her way she nearly steps on an elaborate set-up of toys. She picks up a small plastic moose.

I should probably leave this set up. You'll be mad if I move it, huh?

Takes a load out of the dryer. During the following Max looks around to make sure no one is watching, grabs his backpack and helmet and gives a little wave good-bye to Mom, who is momentarily not paying attention. He heads for the door leading outside and slips out.

SONG 4 (CD TRACK 4): WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL UNDERSCORE

Why are you so obsessed with a store? Why Abercrombie? Is it the symmetry of the layout, or..? The topless male models? Not my taste, but. You download the images. Take your shirt off and make model poses. Something else other people can't understand. Try to explain that...

Admiring Max's work on the floor

You set that up so particularly. Like a kid with a doll house. But different.

She steps on something else...

Ouch!

...a talking toy. "Everybody Sing!"

Mine field! Something ready to go off any minute.

Mom kicks the toy aside. Rethinks. Puts
it back in its place. The washer kicks
in to a different cycle.

SONG 5 (CD TRACK 5): RIBBON

Another blasted noise maker!

MOM

IF I COULD HOLD
BEAUTIFUL BOY
NEED TO CONNECT

IF THIS PERSISTS
INTO BEYOND
I'M FEELING WEAK

IF I COULD CUT
THE RIBBON THAT HOLDS
MY HELIUM DOWN

IF I COULD FLY
FURIOUSLY
UNTIL THIS LIFE

WAS JUST A DOT

WHO WOULD LOOK UP?

Oh, she's just over there. "She'll be alright."

Loud buzz of cycle ending

Got to finish something!

SCENE 3 - OUTSIDE

Max scoots to a particular spot near
the street and at the edge of the
apartment complex. The sound of a busy
street is heard. Max arranges small
figurines from his backpack.

He takes out his Pegasus, a moose, an Einstein action figure, and a mermaid. Sound of a leaf blower is heard. This makes Max retreat and begin to make his noises. A neighbor girl enters. Self-possessed, bossy, a bit older than Max. She stares at him.

MAX

(nervously, not looking at her)

Oh, hi!!

FIN

You live here right?

Max doesn't answer

Right? You ride the little school bus don't you?

Max smiles but doesn't answer.

Don't you? I've seen you get on that little school bus. Those kids are all kind of weird, huh? Hel-lo. Anyone home?

A heavy-set preppily dressed teenaged girl and a stringy-haired boy of a similar age, wearing a shirt with "E=mc2", enter together.

FIN

Knock-knock.

ALBERT

I doubt that.

FIN

Don't you? Ride it?

PEG

So what? It's true. It cost \$300.

ALBERT

That's a waste.

PEG

How would you know? You wear the same thing every day.

FIN

(interjecting)

You're right he doesn't know anything! Anything useful!
Egghead!

PEG

He knows more than you, fish face!

FIN

Yeah, you sit at home and edit Wikipedia all day. And read
smelly old dictionaries cover to cover. What a nerd!

PEG

Not--

Nearly tripping over Max

Hey...oops!

ALBERT

(still to Peg)

Why spend that kind of money on stupid clothes? 'Specially
when --

FIN

...she looks like a giant rhinoceros? No wonder your clothes
are so expensive. It takes a lot of fabric to cover your big--

Leaf blower heard, off. Sound of car
honking

PEG

(retreating)

Hey!

ALBERT

That's not exactly what I was getting at -

FIN

Shut up! Or I'll throw you into the traffic. Don't you have a
Harry Potter convention to get to?

ALBERT

Keep talking, maybe you'll say something intelligent.

FIN

(threatening him)

What did you say???

ALBERT

Nothing.

PEG

(to Albert)

Just ignore her. (to Max) Aren't you the kid who's always with your parents?

No answer

Isn't he the kid who's always with his parents?

FIN

Why don't you answer her? Are you retarded?

PEG

You ride the little school bus, don't you?

ALBERT

Don't you?

FIN

Why don't you say something?

PEG

Hey!

FIN

Are you deaf or just dumb?

ALBERT

Don't you? Ride it?

FIN

Answer me!

PEG

Don't you?

ALBERT

Don't you?

SONG 6 (CD TRACK 6): KIDS AND CARS

FIN

KIDS

DON'T YOU?

DON'T YOU, DON'T
YOU, ETC.

FIN
YOU RIDE THE LITTLE SCHOOL BUS?

Max jumps anxiously

WHY DO YOU JUMP UP AND DOWN LIKE THAT?

PEG
WHY DON'T YOU
ANSWER HER?

KIDS
ANSWER, ANSWER,
ETC.

PEG
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?

ALBERT
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
DON'T YOU TALK?

The leaf blowing man observes the
situation.

FIN
WHY ARE YOU
HUMMING?

KIDS
HUMMING, HUMMING,
ETC.

FIN
WHY DO YOU SHAKE LIKE THAT?

PEG
CAN'T HE ACT NORMAL LIKE US?

ALBERT
HE RIDES THE LITTLE SCHOOL BUS

PEG
WHERE ARE YOU LITTLE BOY?
WHERE ARE YOU LITTLE BOY?

FIN AND ALBERT
WHERE ARE YOU?
WHERE ARE YOU?

The leaf blowing man comes closer, his
blower adding to the rising noise level
and tension

PEG

WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER ME?

ALL THREE

WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?
ARE YOU THERE?

ARE YOU THERE?
WHERE ARE YOU?
LOOK AT ME
LOOK AT ME!

Max nervously kicks. His red croc flings off his foot into the street. Oblivious to danger he lunges into the street to retrieve his shoe. The kids watch in horror. Everything slows down. The man has blown leaves into a massive swirl in space, that elegantly form a shape. Max looks up and runs towards this vision just as the sound of car screeching is heard. It echoes into silence.

MAN

Hey kid. It's an INTERSECTION. Look. Both. Ways. First one way. Then the other. It's all there.

The other children are no longer there. Though deceptively back to normal, there is a distinct change now in the quality of light and setting.

MAN

SONG 7 (CD TRACK 7): SHAPE YOUR WORLD

IT'S ALRIGHT,
DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING
IT'S ALRIGHT,
DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING
REALIZE
YOU SHAPE THE WORLD THAT YOU SEE
CLOSE YOUR EYES
AND SHAPE THE WORLD THAT WILL BE

CLEAR YOUR MIND AND FLOAT AWAY

MAKE THE WORLD YOU NEED TODAY
SWIM THE STREAMS OF YOUR DREAMS
YOUR BRIGHT EYES WILL FIND THE WAY
REVELATION'S NEAR TODAY!
MAKE A FRIEND
AND YOU'LL FLY SO HIGH
TOUCH THE SKY, SO HIGH

HEAR THE STARS
THE MUSIC OF YOUR BEAUTY
SEE A SONG
THE MUSIC OF YOUR HEART
LOOK AROUND
YOU SHAPE THE WORLD THAT YOU SEE
LOOK AROUND

COME WITH ME
AND YOU'LL SEE
COME WITH ME
AND YOU WILL BE

Man retrieves shoe for Max. The Man happens to be wearing the same shoes.

MAN

Nice shoes, little man.

MAX

Nice shoes, little man.

MAN

Reaching out to shake his hand

Homunculus Jones. You can call me Munc.

MAX

Doesn't take his hand, he rapidly shakes or flaps his own hands while jumping up and down

Nice shoes, little man.

MUNC

Does the same as Max, flapping his hands and jumping

Nice to meet you too.

They hop awhile together.

MAX
(sounding remarkably like the
Scarecrow in "Wizard of Oz")
But some people without brains do an awful lot of talking.

MUNC

stops jumping

Talking much about oneself can also be a means to conceal oneself. Fortune cookie. Um...well...I got some work to do.

Munc starts up the leaf blower. He works an area not far from Max. Max gets noticeably agitated in response to the sound. After a few moments, Munc notices this. He turns it off. Max seems instantly better. Munc turns it back on, Max reacts. Off and on and off, Munc can play him like a conductor. He's fascinated.

MAX
I'll eat that

MUNC
What do you mean?

MAX
That.

MUNC
That what?

MAX
That noisy...

MUNC
The leaf blower?

MAX
I'll eat that leaf blower.

MUNC
What do you mean?

MAX
Need to do it

MUNC

Oh. OK. It won't taste very good. Kind of oily...but go ahead.

Max "eats" handfuls of air.

What's your name?

Max doesn't respond.

MUNC

Well, I can't keep calling you "little man" can I? This is a mystery. Can I call you Mystery? How about "M" for short.

Max begins to pack up his backpack

You gotta go or somethin'? Well, okay but do yourself a favor M, remember, look both ways. Know what I'm saying? But don't be afraid to try some things. Sometimes it's the scary stuff that makes you even bigger.

Max pulls on his own skin, rather vigorously

MUNC

Hey, hey, what're doing there, Mystery?

MAX

Need to do it! (then in Munc's voice) "Makes you even bigger."

MUNC

I see. But, ah, keep your skin on there. That stuff'll stretch with ya.

Max looks quizzically at Munc for a long beat, then shrugs as if in character. Max puts on his backpack and helmet and wobbles off, as clumsily and slowly as ever on his scooter. Unnoticed, Munc rights the scooter before it tips, and sends Max in a particular direction. He hesitates, then with concern follows watchfully.

SCENE 4 - HOME

TV

...Today, a seven-year old boy was found floating in a backyard swimming pool. And another child abduction shatters the comfort of a quiet community. Nationwide the numbers have grown exponentially. More on "Snatched" at 6...blah, blah, blah

MOM

Max?

Dad runs in

DAD

I'm back! I forgot something. No brains left.

MOM

(entering)

Well, good. Better pick up some more waffles today. That was the last one.

DAD

We have pancake mix.

MOM

He'll only eat those frozen waffles. And two other things.

TV

...killer SUVs, should you be worried about your family's safety?...

DAD

I know. Sounds simple.

MOM

You're telling me. You were supposed to get some yesterday.

DAD

I was?

MOM

With the spinach and turkey bacon?

DAD

When is his standardized--

MOM
Wednesday. Why didn't you get waffles?

DAD
I got pancake mix. I thought he might try --

MOM
Dream on. I didn't even know you'd left.

DAD
Well I did.

MOM
I'll get some later.

DAD
No, I'll stop on my way home.

MOM
Forget about it.

DAD
You don't think I'm capable?.

MOM
(mockingly)
"Well, you know God gives special children to special people."

DAD
Don't go there. You don't buy into that anyway.
Why was the door open?

Freeze.

MOM
I didn't open it.

Ice. Look around.

DAD
Oh no.

TV
Reawaken the child in yourself! Indulge! Try it today!

They run around in different directions
looking for Max.

DAD
(having to yell even louder
over the TV noise)
Check the linen closet, he likes to sit in there.

MOM
I need you here more!
(from OS?)
What if he left? What if he falls in the drainage ditch? They
still haven't covered it. What about the broken glass near
the dumpster? And you know how fast people drive out on the
main street.

DAD
He can't be too far.
(cresting the TV ad's absurd
volume)
Dammit. (calling out) MAX?!

TV
TRY IT! TRY IT! TRY IT!

Dad turns off the TV.

SCENE 5 - OUTSIDE BEHIND THE APARTMENTS

Max enters on his scooter. In one hand
he clutches his Pegasus toy. He stops
to sit and plays with his toy.

DAD
(from off at a distance, but
with urgency)
Max! Max? Max!! Where are you?

Max pays no attention to the calls.
Munc, who has been keeping an eye on
Max out sight, appears.

MUNC
Hey there, Mystery, do you think they're worried about you?

Max doesn't reply.

Well, worry's not the thing, exactly. Worry's in a hurry to
get nowhere. You know? Well I know you don't want...or can't
talk to me -- You wonder why I'm here?

MAX

Why I'm here?

MUNC

Why you're here. To share something about...um...reality.

MAX

Un-reality?

MUNC

Kind of. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to jump in and get your hair wet. Y'know, air is just water with holes in it. Bottle cap.

We hear other voices from off:

PEG'S MOM (OS)

Peg, will you get those wet things up on the line right now??

PEG (OS)

I'm on the phone, Mom

PEG'S MOM (OS)

Well get off and do it!!

PEG (OS)

Mo-o-om!

Peg, the teen girl, enters, stomps angrily across the stage and disappears pulling a clothesline. Munc and Max observe. Munc picks up the Pegasus toy.

DAD (OS)

(with still more urgency)

Max? Max!!

Max is still oblivious to the call for him, while almost simultaneously, a winged Peg reappears from the original side of the stage carrying the other end of the clothesline, complete with sheets, towels, underwear, etc. Music. She floats up, attaches the line, and swings up to standing on the clothesline.

PEG

Hey, look up! Come on up!

MAX

Pegasus!

PEG

Help me out. Follow me!

SONG 8 (CD TRACK 8): DREAM

LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT I SEE
COME AND DANCE AND PLAY WITH ME
REAL IS NOT REALITY
IT'S A DREAM
LIKE A DREAM
NEED TO BE WHAT I BELIEVE
FLY AWAY FOR ALL TO SEE
SHARE A NEW REALITY
IN A DREAM
LIKE A DREAM

MAX

Go up there! With Pegasus!

PEG

Take my arm!

She dangles a sweatshirt for him to grab the "arm". He sees how high she is and gets nervous.

EMPTY ARMS WILL WAVE HELLO
EMPTY FEET WILL DANCE BELOW
NIGHTIES SWAY AND TOWELS PLAY
IN THE WORLD WE MAKE TODAY
IN OUR DREAM
IN OUR DREAMS

MAX

No, don't want to!

PEG

Well then grab more of that line in the basket, will ya?

He doesn't know how to respond.

GRAB THE LINE COME PLAY WITH ME
FEEL YOUR SENSES SOAR WITH ME
IN A WORLD OF PURITY
LIKE A DREAM

LIKE A DREAM

Here, I'll get that.

She swoops down and grabs some clothesline, which she flies up with to attach up high making a diagonal line.

You can start on the ground, see?

She attaches a number of clotheslines to criss-cross the stage.

You can climb it like a ladder. That's it, hold on.

MAX

(grinning)

Be careful Max!

He squeals, happily, and climbs up a few wobbly rungs.

PEG

Hey, my name's not Max...oh...you're Max?

MAX

I fly!

In his elation he misses a footing, flips over a string or two and lands with a thud on the ground.

PEG

Whoops! Watch out, Max!

MAX

I cracked my butt!

PEG

(laughing)

Ha, ha! Not possible! You're like a baby giraffe you know that?

MAX

(whimpering)

Be careful Max!

PEG

You need some wings too.

WE CAN GLIDE ON FEATHERED WINGS
LEAVE ALL THE MASS OF EARTHLY THINGS
IN OUR DREAMS

She shakes out a fluffy set of wings
from the laundry basket and puts them
on him.

Here, you try. It'll be fun!

MAX
(she said the secret word. Max
screams)

Ahhhhhh!

PEG
What's the matter?

MAX
Secret word.

PEG
Oh, right!

She climbs, he follows in step.
Now let go!

Music becomes airier. Pretty soon they
are flying to higher rungs, spinning,
dancing, hanging laundry every which
way.

KIDS AND MUNC	PEG
EMPTY ARMS WILL	THEY DON'T KNOW
WAVE HELLO	
EMPTY FEET WILL	I CAN FLY
DANCE BELOW	
NIGHTIES SWAY AND	THEY CAN'T SEE.
TOWELS PLAY	
THE WORLD WE KNOW	THEY WON'T TRY
SO FAR AWAY	

PEG AND COMPANY

WE CAN GLIDE ON FEATHERED WINGS
LEAVE ALL THE MASS OF EARTHLY THINGS
REAL IS NOT REALITY
IT'S ANYTHING YOU WANT TO BE
IN YOUR DREAM

PEG
IF YOU WANT TO BE LIKE ME
OPEN UP YOUR EYES AND SEE
REAL IS NOT REALITY

As the song and dance end, the lines of
laundry detach and sproing off,
suddenly clearing the space.

PEG'S MOM (OS)
C'mon Peg, your appointment's in fifteen minutes, we've got
to go now!

PEG
Mo-om!!...coming! You know, Max, you can do anything. They
make fun of *me* because I'm heavy. (lights up) I can fly!
What's your secret?

By the way, I'm no Pegasus (sassily) I'm a gazelle with
wings!

She runs off.

MAX
(thinking about how to respond,
then echoing that ad)
I'm 47 years old and haven't looked this good since high
school. My husband calls me his trophy wife!

Munc emerges from the laundry.

MUNC
Hey, Max-man! You let go! Cool, huh?

Max gets his gear, and begins to ride
off on his scooter, but this time he's
quite a bit swifter.

MUNC
Book-it, my friend.

SCENE 6 - OUTSIDE

SONG 9 (CD TRACK 9): REACHING

Dad runs on, out of breath. Music.

This is going to be OK. He's probably just a few feet away.
He just got distracted and he's playing somewhere. Close.

DAD

HE'S JUST GOING TO SHOW UP
THIS ALL WILL BE JUST FINE
I CAN'T EVEN THINK THAT...
HOW COULD I BE SO BLIND

COULDN'T SEE THE BLESSING
TIL IT WAS SWEEPED AWAY
THOUGHT I NEEDED QUIET
QUIET'S TOO MUCH PAIN

Music plays out under next dialogue

SOMEWHERE ELSE, AT THE DUMPSTER

MOM (OS)

Max! Come on home honey! Max!! Where are you?

Without noticing this he gets out his
Einstein action figure and plays with
it.

Stringy haired boy from scene three
stands precariously on top of dumpster
spouting facts to an imaginary
audience. Old books and magazines spill
out.

ALBERT

...Did you know that when writing systems were invented in
ancient civilizations, they used nearly everything that could
be written on to write on, like stone, clay, and tree bark?
Alphabetic writing began in Egypt around 1800 BC. At first
the words were not separated from each other and there was no
punctuation texts were written from right to left and left to
right and even had alternate lines read in opposite
directions the same way a farmer drives an ox to plough his
fields!

MAX

(having noticed his T-shirt:
"e=mc2")

Relativity!

Music again

DAD

I'LL REPEAT THE PRESIDENTS
PLAY ALL HIS FUNNY GAMES
LIFE'S A LOOP ALREADY
I WILL NOT COMPLAIN

Suspension

IF I COULD CUT
THE RIBBON THAT HOLDS
MY HELIUM DOWN

IF I COULD FLY
FURIOUSLY
UNTIL THIS LIFE
WAS JUST A DOT

ALBERT

Hey! Look at all these books that people just throw away. Did you know that every three seconds, a book just gets trashed? That's twenty books a minute. That's one thousand four hundred and forty perfectly good books a day. I read that somewhere. Let me see.

He shuffles through his books

DAD

(Music starts up again as he
sings)

COULD I ESCAPE?
WOULD I BE SANE?

MOM

FALLING OFF MY CENTER
COULD I BREAK THE WALL
PRACTICE REPETITION
BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT, THAT'S ALL

ALBERT

Oh, this one's a beaut. Found it just the other day. "The Elegant Universe". He says string theory unravels the central Gordian knot of contemporary theoretical physics.

MAX

String theory!

ALBERT

From one principle, string theory provides a single explanatory framework capable of encompassing all forces and all matter. Einstein figured that out.

MAX

Your one stop solution for all your office needs!

Music starts up again

MOM

I'LL TAKE HIM TO THE EDGES
RACE HIM DOWN THE STREET
WE'LL DANCE UP ON THE HIGH WIRE
NO SAFETY NET BENEATH

Suspension

MOM/DAD

IF I COULD CUT
THE RIBBON THAT HOLDS
MY HELIUM DOWN

ALBERT

Wait, wait, wait. Check out this one. It's a gigantic book about the Presidents of the United States. It only goes up to Eisenhower, but it has excellent descriptions, and here, look at these drawings! Oh, oh, hang on there a second, I've got this book on drawing that is guaranteed to get you to draw better than you ever thought possible. I read once that people have the most amazing, limitless creativity in them that just is waiting to be unlocked...or unleashed I think the author said. Some people never get theirs let out, but some have their gardens watered and so the energy in that capsule, seed, just explodes. Blooms. Most people don't seem to have any idea what I'm talking about most of the time, which is ridiculous because I know exactly what I mean. Why don't people just listen, you know? My parents tell me I talk too much, so I just quit talking around them. Hey, was that your mother calling for you?

MAX

I like the presidents, Millard Fillmore...

ALBERT

Did you know that Millard Fillmore's wife was so shocked to find out that the White House had no library that she asked the president to get Congress to pay for one and picked out the books herself?

MAX

13th president, 1850-1853.

ALBERT

That's right!

MAX

Mount Rushmore!

ALBERT

LOVE it! 4 of them on there. Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, Lincoln. 36 miles West of Rapid City. Covers 1,278 acres and is 5,725 feet above sea level. 2 million visitors annually.

MAX

Sure!

MAX

We can talk about Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, Lincoln, Johnson, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, Harrison, Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama, if you want to.

This impeccable list from the small child blows Albert's mind and literally blows him backwards into the dumpster

MAX

Einstein?

Max pulls the president toy (from the first scene) out of his backpack. He presses a button or two. Same music with the facts. Just then the lights change. A hand reaches around from behind the dumpster to place a crappy old boom box. The hand re-emerges, pops in a cassette and hits "play". A throbbing beat. Rising up out of the dumpster, the first thing we see is the top of some Don King-like Einsteinian puffed up hair, revealing a new Gangsta Albert, his T-shirt now reading: "MC Squared."

At the end of each verse, Max will "jam"
by "playing" his Presidents machine.

SONG 10 (CD TRACK 10): RUSHED UP

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET YOUR RUSH UP
AND GET RUSHED UP
AND LET THE SIXTY FOOT FACES GET YOU PUMPED UP
GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA SAY- YEA

JUST A LITTLE SOUTHWEST OF RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA
THERE'S A NATIONAL MEMORIAL SOMEBODY PROBABLY TOLD YA
THAT IT'S ON THE MOUNTAIN...SIDE
WAY UP IN THE...SKY
FOUR FACES CHISELED, EACH 60 FEET...HIGH
THEY REPRESENT 4 GREAT PRESIDENTS:
WE GOT WASHINGTON, LINCOLN, TEDDY ROOSEVELT, AND
JEFFERSON
IT COST US MILLIONS JUST TO CARVE THEIR GRILLS
I GUESS THAT'S WHY THREE OF FOUR GOT THEIR FACES ON OUR
DOLLARS BILLS

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP
AND GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA GET YOUR HANDS UP
GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE THE PRESIDENTS SAY- HEY

A fashion-show runway appears and as
each president is described, a model
dressed recognizably like that
president struts on down, back, and
out. Max's obsession with Abercrombie
models informing this fusion of images.
These models are played by the rest of
the cast, also informed by Max's need
to "cast" those around him into his
fantasies.

WASHINGTON WAS THE FIRST ONE TO LEAD US FROM THE CURSE
OF
THE KING OF ENGLAND TAKING MONEY FROM OUR PURSE
BUT THEY DIDN'T WANT TO LET US GO
UNTIL WE WON THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR WITH GEORGE AS THE
GENERAL
THEN HE BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT

AND SAID NEUTRALITY WITH EUROPE WAS IMPORTANT OVER
EVERYTHING
HISTORY CONFIRMS HE WAS A SMARTY...

Max presses buttons

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Washington was a member of the Federalist's party.

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP
AND GET RUSHED UP
AND LET THE SIXTY FOOT FACES GET YOU PUMPED UP
GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA SAY- YEA

YEAH, THE 16TH PRESIDENT
KNOWN FOR HIS RHETORIC
ABRAHAM LINCOLN YEAH HE BEAT THE CONFEDERATES
LEADING THE UNION THROUGH THE CIVIL WAR
AS THE VERY FOUNDATION OF OUR NATION ALMOST HIT THE
FLOOR
HE WANTED EVERYONE TO STOP ENSLAVING
TOLD US SO IN THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION. UH
HIS LEADERSHIP KEPT THE NATION HARDY...

Max presses buttons

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Lincoln was a member of the Republican Party.

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP
AND GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA GET YOUR HANDS UP
GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU'VE BEEN TO MOUNT RUSHMORE, SAY- HEY

MR. TJ, WAS A FARMER FROM VA
AN INTELLECTUAL IF YOU COULD ASK THEN HE'D SAY
HIS FAVORITE FOOD WAS FOR THOUGHT
HE LOVED MUSIC AND ART
CHURCH AND STATE, HE WISHED THE TWO WERE APART
HE SENT LEWIS AND CLARK TO GO DISCOVER THE
LAND WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI BOUGHT FROM THE FRENCH
GOVERNMENT
HIS ARCHITECTURE SHOWS US HE WAS ARTY

Max presses buttons, but also joyously speaks with the machine.

PRESIDENT MACHINE AND MAX

Jefferson was a member of the Democratic-Republican party.

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP
AND GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA GET YOUR HANDS UP
GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE ALL THE PRESIDENTS SAY- HEY

Max decides he can do this himself the next time around. He slides the machine aside and prepares to do so.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT WAS ALWAYS KNOWN AS A TOUGH GUY
HE LEAD THE ROUGH RIDERS AND NEVER WAS GUN SHY
HE ALSO FOUGHT TO REFORM OUR NATION
SO HE SHUT DOWN 40 GREEDY CORPORATIONS
HE GOT THE PANAMA CANAL AND HE WAS SO WELL LIKED
HE WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN TO WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE
JUST IN TIME NOT A SECOND TARDY

MAX

Roosevelt was a member of the Republican party.

Max is overwhelmed by his own accomplishment. His excitement turns to high anxiety as he begins to contort his body, rocking and flapping.

ALBERT

EVERYBODY GET RUSHED UP
AND GET RUSHED UP
AND LET THE SIXTY FOOT FACES GET YOU PUMPED UP
GET RUSHED UP
AND IF YOU LOVE SOUTH DAKOTA SAY- YEA

MAX

(Alvin-y)Nix-on!!! (more angrily)Nix-on!!!!

He does the classic Nixon impersonation over and over again, shaking and vocalizing with increasing energy.

ALBERT

Easy! Easy! C'mon, easy does it.

Max begins throwing books and things around, decking Albert on the head with a copy of the Norton Anthology of Poetry.

ALBERT

Hey, hey, chill out!

MAX

No, I warm. Too hot!

ALBERT

No, I mean take a chill pill.

MAX

No pill, no pill.

ALBERT

We were cooking there, Max.

MAX

Hungry!

ALBERT

No, I mean you know a lot of information for a little guy. You know all that by heart?

MAX

Heart pumps 30 quarts of blood per minute.

ALBERT

Yeah, I know crazy stuff like that too. No, I mean by heart, like you don't need the book anymore to tell you.

MAX

Presidents Book talks.

ALBERT

Yes, but that's not really talking like we are doing now. Like friends do.

ALBERT'S MOM (O.S.)

Al-bert!! Get on home!

ALBERT

Well, gotta turn tail and --

MAX

You have a tail?

ALBERT

I have to get after it. Could you clean up a bit? I hate a messy dumpster. Oh --

He hands Max the anthology.

Here. You dropped this on my head like some kamikaze Newton apple. You should check out some of this poetry. It might calm you down.

Albert leaves

MAX

Friend?

He turns around in a few circles checking to see if he has a tail.

SCENE 7 DAD

SONG 11 (CD TRACK 11): WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL UNDERSCORE REPRISE

He is trying to stay calm.

DAD

If I were Max...where would I...If I were Max....?

(as if counting to five)

OK, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison...

SONG 12 (CD TRACK 12): HIS NAME IS MAX

DAD

JUST LET ME IN. TO KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE, MAX
I'LL FIND YOU THEN. I'LL GET WHAT YOU SEE, MAX

Max scooters on and stops near Dad. He parks his scooter and sets up toys from his pack. Dad is unaware of Max's presence.

HE LIKES PIZZA
AND PIZZA CHEESE

AND PEGASUS
HE LIKES EINSTEIN
AND STRING THEORY
AND THE PRESIDENTS
AND HE'S DIFFERENT

MOM
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL

DAD
HIS NAME IS MAX AND HE IS A GOOD BOY

MOM
WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL

DAD
HIS NAME IS MAX AND HE IS A GOOD BOY

MUNC AND PEG
THIS IS NORMAL

Dad starts hearing things

DAD
HE LIKES PIZ--

PRESIDENT MACHINE
President George Washington

DAD
AND PIZ--

PRESIDENT MACHINE
President Abraham Lincoln

DAD
AND PEG--

PRESIDENT MACHINE
President Thomas Jefferson

DAD
HE LIKES EIN--

PRESIDENT MACHINE
Was a member of the...was a member of the...

DAD

AND STRING--

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Press, press, press, press, press, press a button.

DAD

AND THE PRESIDENTS
THIS IS DIFFERENT

WHY CAN'T WE BE NORMAL?

Max?

PRESIDENTS MACHINE

Ser-ser-ser-served as the sixty-first president of the United States from 2045-2049.

DAD

How is that --?

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Party. Party. Party, etc.

DAD

Stop that!

PRESIDENT MACHINE

No!

It stops. He regroups. Breathes.

DAD

There's something wrong with --

PRESIDENT MACHINE

No! No! No! No!, etc.

SONG 13 (CD TRACK 13): PRESS A BUTTON

DAD

Please don't do that! Would you PLEASE STOP! (quoting a symptom) "They lack empathy!"

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Press a button. Press a button. Press a button. Press a button.

DAD

(regurgitating)

They engage in repetitive movements, in 1856 accepted the nomination for President of the Know Nothing, such as rocking and twirling, twirling and rocking, self-abusive behavior, biting, head banging without any progress toward settling the major issues. They don't know how to play interactively. Religion: Unitarian. He emphasized nonintervention in foreign disputes with little regard for the interests of the person to whom they are speaking. There is no cure. Stereotyped, repetitive, typed repetitive, typed repetitive, or unusual use of language. No one to call. Was a member of. Was a member of. Was a member of. No help. Attended one-room schools, and fell in love with the redheaded teacher. Only characteristics. Preoccupation with occupation with occupation with occupation with certain objects or subjects. Object. Subject. Object. Subject. Object, subject, object, subjective, objective, subjective, subjective, subjective...

PRESIDENT MACHINE

Press a button. Press a button. Press a button. Press a button.

Dad rocks repetitively.

The following words are a recording of Dad's voice. Dad sings a duet with these words.

DAD'S VOICE
They engage in
repetitive
movements, in 1856
accepted the
nomination for
President of the
Know Nothing, such
as rocking and
twirling, twirling
and rocking, self-
abusive behavior,
biting, head
banging without
any progress
toward settling
the major issues.
They don't know
how to play
interactively.
Religion:
Unitarian. He
emphasized
nonintervention in
foreign disputes
with little regard
for the interests
of the person to
whom they are
speaking. There is
no cure.
Stereotyped,
repetitive, typed
repetitive, typed
repetitive, or
unusual use of
language. No one
to call. Was a
member of. Was a
member of. Was a
member of. No
help. Attended one-
room schools, and
fell in love with
the redheaded
teacher. Only
characteristics.

DAD
(threatening
the machine)
GIVE ME MORE! GIVE
ME MORE! GIVE ME
MORE!
MORE! MORE! MORE!
AGAIN AND AGAIN
AND AGAIN AND
AGAIN
AND OVER AND OVER
AND OVER AND OVER
(back to dad's
inner thoughts)
AND NO
TRANSFORMATION
AND NO SHIFT
NO FUTURE TO PLAN
NO PAST TO GRASP
NO FUTURE TO PLAN
NO PAST TO GRASP
AND NOTHING BUT
NOW. NOW. NOW.
NOW. NOW. NOW.
NEED TO, NEED TO,
DISAPPEAR,
DISSIPATE,
DIMINISH, DECLINE
DEVOLVE, DISSOLVE
DEVOLVE, DISSOLVE
DEVOLVE, DISSOLVE
DISSOLVE,
DISSOLVE,
DISSOLVE, etc.

VOICES

YOU'RE OK. YOU'RE OK. YOU'RE OK, etc.

PRESIDENT MACHINE

PRESS A BUTTON....PRESS A BUTTON...
NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!, NO! NO! NO! etc.

Static noise drowns out everything

SCENE 8 - OUTSIDE AT THE DUMPSTER

Max and Munc organize the dumpster books and things into some kind of structure. Max sits on it, humming the Casio melody, and puzzling over the book Albert left him with. Munc helps.

MUNC

Sittin' on the tree of knowledge?

MAX

Ant hill. Newton Ant Hology.

MUNC

Newton who?

Checking out the book

Let me see here....That's a book of poetry. Oh! Norton Anthology. I wandered lonely as a cloud.

MAX

Cloud?

MUNC

That's a simile. Then we can move on to metaphor.

MAX

Meta-five? Meta-six? Met a friend.

MUNC

True friend?

MAX

I don't lie.

MUNC
You don't lie.

MAX
I standing up!

MUNC
I'm standing up for you.

Beat.

MAX
Let's sit down.

MUNC
Simile. Something is like something. It's nice to tell a friend they're pretty like something.

MAX
You are pretty like Abraham Lincoln.

MUNC
Abe was good lookin' but that's not quite what I mean. What is something you like about Abe?

MAX
His beard?

MUNC
What's a beard made of?

MAX
Hair?

MUNC
Right! Now say you have hair as lustrous as Lincoln's beard.

MAX
Luscious as Lincoln.

MUNC
Maybe just, "you have pretty hair."

MAX
You have pretty hair.

MUNC
Why, thank you.

He looks back into the book.

MUNC

(relishing the name)

Mr. Words Worth.

SONG 14 (CD TRACK 14): CLOUD

MUNC	PEG/ALBERT/FIN
I WANDERED LONELY	LONELY. FLOATING.
AS A CLOUD	YOU ARE.
THAT FLOATS ON	BESIDE THE LAKE,
HIGH O'ER VALES	BENEATH THE TREES,
AND HILLS,	FLUTTERING AND
WHEN ALL AT ONCE I	DANCING IN THE
SAW A CROWD,	BREEZE
A HOST, OF GOLDEN	
DAFFODILS	
BESIDE THE LAKE,	
BENEATH THE TREES	
FLUTTERING AND	
DANCING IN THE	
BREEZE	

MUNC

Munc dances around like a daffodil

A "crowd" of daffodils swaying in time with the breeze! Like you're up there, you think you're all alone, and then you suddenly realize everything is dancing together.

MAX

I'm a golden daffodil!

He sways back and forth, his hands in the air.

PEG/FIN

BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES
BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES

MUNC

You are in that crowd.
You are that cloud.
You are the lake.
You are the breeze.

PEG/FIN

BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES
BESIDE THE LAKE, BENEATH THE TREES

MUNC

You're not "other". You're "it". You are...

MAX

You are.

MUNC

(pointing at Max)

YOU ARE

MAX

(gesturing with his whole hand
towards Munc)

YOU ARE

MUNC

(pointing again)

YOU ARE

MAX

(now with his pointer finger,
looks Munc in the eye, for the
first time)

You are kinder than kindergarten!

MUNC

Whoa.

SCENE 9 - MOM

Mom enters

MOM

Max!

Max?

Max?

Figures appear in shadows. She sees
one.

Oh! You scared me there. Have you found him? I searched every
inch of the apartment. I've been in every closet five times.

I've been everywhere. I know he can't be far. But what if he is? I'm feeling queasy. Do you think he's out here somewhere?

Where is he? No answer

No answer

Who - MOM

SONG 15 (CD TRACK 15): POWERFUL POWER LINES

MOM
ARE YOU?

VOICES
ARE YOU, ARE YOU, ETC

MOM
YOU'RE NOT MY -- WHAT DO YOU WANT?

WHAT'S HAPPENING, I CAN'T MOVE. I'M STUCK

I AM SO FROZEN IN-

VOICES
FROZEN, FROZEN, ETC.

MOM
SIDE, IT'S SO HARD
THIS SHELL

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
DON'T YOU TALK?
WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER

VOICES
ANSWER, ANSWER, ETC

MOM
I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING
LADYBUG, DRAGONFLY
FLY AWAY HOME RIGHT NOW

(empty space) HOUSE ON FIRE!
(empty space) CHILD WILL --!

VOICES

BURN

MOM

You don't scare me!

WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER ME?
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME?
ARE YOU THERE?

VOICES

ARE YOU, ARE YOU, ETC.

MOM

ARE YOU THERE?
WHERE ARE YOU?
LOOK AT ME
I AM --

A bell and then silence.

MOM

Powerful power lines are like dogs!

Dad enters. Oddly detached, blissed.
When they speak the following
"echoalic" lines, they should sound
like Max would, or did, say these
lines.

DAD

(Pee Wee. Without making eye
contact.)

"Oh, hi."

MOM

"I don't like the forest! It's dark and creepy!"

DAD

"Of course, I don't know, but I think it'll get darker before
it gets lighter."

MOM

"Do - do you suppose we'll meet any wild animals?"

MAX
"Mmmm...we might."

MOM
"Oh."

DAD
"Looks like we came a long way for nothing."

Mom looks Dad in the eye. The bliss fades. She is overcome with emotion.

DAD
"What's the matter?"

MOM
I can't...I can't...I can't...

DAD
"President Millard Fillmore. Fillmore served as the thirteenth--"

Max has entered. They don't see him.

MOM
(trying to get back the bliss)
"Cornish Pixies...!"

DAD
"As the thirteenth--"

MOM
"Cornish Pixies...!"

DAD
"As the thirteenth--"

MOM
"Cornish Pixies...!"

MAX
Freshly plucked!

MOM
"Why?"

DAD
"Need to do it!"

MOM

"Why?"

DAD

"Need to, need to, need to."

MOM

"That wasn't in the job description!"

DAD

Slipping...slipping...slipping

MOM

Feeling...feeling...feeling

SONG 16 (CD TRACK 16): GET CLEAR

MUNC

YOU CAN FIND HIM. YOU'VE ARRIVED HERE.
YOU SHOULD FIND HIM. NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE.
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH. UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH. UH-OH UH-OH, UH-OH
UH-OH

YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?.
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?
YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?

YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?
YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?

YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?.
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?
YOU ARE SINKING, AREN'T YOU?
YOU'RE NOT THINKING, ARE YOU?

YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?
YOU HAVE CHOICES DON'T YOU?

HOLD ON TO BOTH SIDES

YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE HERE,
AND BE THERE AS WELL.
LIVE IN BOTH WORLDS.
JUST NEED TO GET CLEAR
SO YOU CAN SEE HIM STANDING HERE
IN HIS WORLD SO BLISSFULLY CLEAR

HE NEEDS YOU THERE AND HERE.
JUST NEED TO GET CLEAR
SO YOU CAN SEE HIM STANDING HERE
IN HIS WORLD SO BLISSFULLY CLEAR
HE NEEDS YOU THERE AND HERE.

MOM

AN EASY FEELING.
I AM FLOATING, FLOATING
THE SCHOOL BUS LEAVES AT EIGHT
WHAT IS THIS LOVELY STATE?
A BLISS. A BLISS. A BLISS. A BLISS.
HAPPY. HAPPY. HAPPY. HAPPY. HAPPY.
ADRIFT, SET FREE, TO BE, JUST BE
SOARING THROUGH OPEN SPACE.
BUY WAFFLES AGAIN
NO LOVE WITHOUT HIM
YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE HERE
AND BE THERE AS WELL
LIVE IN BOTH WORLDS
FEEL LIGHT. DRIFT BLISSFUL. DRIFT BLISSFUL
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH,
UH-OH, UH-OH, UH-OH
I WANT TO STAY
I WANT TO STAY WANT TO STAY

DAD

SLIPPING INTO A
FUNNY FEELING BUT
THRILLING OUT OF SIGHT
THRILLING OUT OF SIGHT
MUST TAKE CARE OF HIM
FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE
JUST TAKE CARE OF ME
FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE
A PRECIPICE. A PRECIPICE
I WANT TO JUMP. BUT NOT TO LAND
I WANT TO JUMP. BUT NOT TO LAND
I WANT TO JUMP
SWIRLING SO RECKLESSLY
SWIRLING SO RECKLESSLY
BUY WAFFLES AGAIN
NO LOVE WITHOUT HIM
YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BE HERE
AND BE THERE AS WELL
LIVE IN BOTH WORLDS
I FEEL ADRIFT
CUT LOOSE, SEE ME
I WANT TO STAY WANT TO STAY

(beat)

Here. DAD

I don't know how. MOM

Press any button to begin. MAX

Max presses his small casio keyboard into Dad's hand.

Here. Press the button. DAD

Mom looks at it. She presses a key. Music plays.

SONG 17 (CD TRACK 17): CASIO POETRY

Hope. MOM
(from the feeling the music gives her)

MAX
holds his chin like Abe Lincoln
Hmm. Let's be methodical...I know!

using the dressing ritual he prepares Mom and Dad for a dance

Two steps to the left--

He brings Dad to Mom
Peek round the bend--

He puts Mom's hand on Dad's shoulder
Under the hedge--

He puts Dad's hand on Mom's waist
Half step again.

Over the top-- He moves them a little closer

One to the right-- He rest Mom's head on Dad's shoulder

A step at a time. He removes himself, taking a big step

MOM

DAD

Looking at her

A step at a time. Mom and Dad dance to the music.

MAX

Free! He does his own little dance.

MUNC

"And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils."

(after Mom and Dad)

Don't lose him.

Final couplet.

SCENE 10 - OUTSIDE AT THE DRAINAGE DITCH

Max comes up to the drainage ditch, the water having collected into a pool before the stopped up cement block passage. On the far side of this sits a beautiful mermaid, formerly known as Fin.

MAX

(in awe)

A waterfall! Sparkling like Mount Rushmore in the dazzling sunshine.

MERMAID

Hungry?

Who said that? MAX

Over here! MERMAID

Oh, yes. Hello there! MAX

Hello! MERMAID

Hi. MAX

Hi. MERMAID

Hi. Are you a mermaid? MAX

Are you a merman? FIN

Maybe so. MAX

Maybe so. FIN

How did you get there? MAX

How did you get there? FIN

Are you copying me? MAX

Are you copying me? FIN

Are you copying me? MAX

Maybe so. FIN

Beat.

MAX

Wish I could sit close to you
Like a couple o'sardines in a tin
Even if we had no view
I could hold your fin.

MERMAID

(laughs)

You're funny!

MAX

You're pretty like Abraham Linc-- I mean, cake frosting.

MERMAID

You're dashing.

MAX

You're nice.

MERMAID

Thank you. Will you be my friend?

SONG 18A (CD TRACK 18, FIRST HALF): POETRY

MAX

YOU ARE MORE POETIC THAN POETRY
MORE VISUAL THAN VISION
WARMER THAN WOOL
YOU ARE MORE DELICIOUS THAN DOUGHNUTS
TASTIER THAN TRUFFLES
SWEETER THAN CINNAMON SWIRLS
YOU ARE KINDER THAN KINDERGARTEN
MORE HONEST THAN HONESTY
FREER THAN FREEDOM
YOU FLOW THROUGH ME LIKE AIR

Mom and Dad have entered. They choose
not to intervene. They watch. The water
sounds begin to sound like ocean waves.

MAX

YOU ARE

MERMAID

AM I?

MAX

MORE POETIC THAN POETRY

YOU SEE
MORER VISUAL THAN VISION
SEE ME
WARMER THAN WOOL.
YOU ARE
AM I?
MORER DELICIOUS THAN DOUGHNUTS
KNOW YOU
TASTIER THAN TRUFFLES
KNOW ME
SWEETER THAN CINNAMON SWIRLS
YOU
AM I WHAT
ARE KINDER THAN KINDERGARTEN
YOU THINK I AM?
MORER
YOU MAKE ME

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

MERMAID

MAX

HONEST THAN HONESTY

MERMAID
FEEL PRETTY. UNDERSTAND

MAX
FREER THAN FREEDOM

MERMAID
HOW I FEEL.

MAX AND MERMAID
YOU FLOW THROUGH ME LIKE AIR

MERMAID
I AM HERE, THIS IS REAL

MAX AND MERMAID
FILLING MY HEART WITH POETRY
SHOWING ME A DEEPER LAYER

SONG 18B (CD TRACK 18, SECOND HALF): WATER

MERMAID
(with MOM and DAD echoing in
one voice)
I was so lonely. I have found you.

MERMAID
Swim over here. Come to me.

The sound of the waves becomes more
dramatic and threatening.

Max? Max? Max? Max? Max? Max?

MOM
(overlapping Mermaid)
Max? Max? Max? Max? Max? Max?

As she calls his name, her voice takes
on first a mysterious siren call, then
cross-fades into his mother's call.
This time he is alert to her voice. Max
jumps into the water to join
Mermaid/Mom. There is a splash.

He falls under the water. He begins to sink. Heartbeat, then underwater sound perspective. More and more he quits fighting the waters and just lets go. He floats down and down back into his bed. The water drains leaving a fetal heartbeat, and then the sound of a ticking clock.

SCENE 11 - HOME

Max is slowly stirring. He is damp. His parents hover over the bed. The neighborhood kids are there as well.

Max? MOM

Max? DAD

Max? Is he OK? PEG

Hey, Max? ALBERT

Max? FIN

SONG 19 (CD TRACK 19): THIS IS NORMAL

MAX
(seeing his parents standing over him)
You and I are gonna be presidents and Mom can be first lady and we can sleep in the white house and in the morning we can get in the president's car and drive to the mall and go to Abercrombie and get pine cones and pipe cleaners and then Gramma can make up pancakes like Sponge Bob - in the morning and she can call for Gary Snail and she says, "Miss Tuftsie!" and for dinner we can have holographic meatloaf like Plankton...

Max is... DAD

Max is... MOM

We love you, Max. MOM/DAD

MAX
(now noticing the other kids)
Pegasus! Einstein! Fish-face!

He flaps his hands, excitedly,
autistically.

Is he better? PEG

THIS IS NORMAL. MOM

Mm-hmmm. DAD

Max is perfect. MOM

Max is Max. DAD

Max is. MAX

Max is. Max. MOM/DAD

Is. MAX

THIS IS NORMAL. MOM/DAD

Munc enters carefully.

MUNC
Excuse me, but I found this outside by the street. I believe
it belongs to you?

He hands Max the President Machine.

You are?

I am. MAX
We are. He looks to his parents and friends.
ALL
THIS IS NORMAL.
Munc nods and slips away.
MAX
I turn it off.
Max presses the off button.

CD TRACK 20: PRESIDENT MACHINE END

PRESIDENT MACHINE
Good night, and God bless America.