

# Highbury Whispers

A new musical

## **Script by**

Ben Critchley

Lucy Carmichael

Megan Devine

Lula Peacock

Rosie Morgan-Males

Sophia Leete

## Cast:

**Thomas Ibberson**, a butler in the house who reluctantly becomes a soldier, father of Harriet, late 20s – later appears as a ghost

**Mary-Anne Ibberson** his wife, a maid in the house, Harriet's mother, late 20s – later appears as a ghost, Kind, loving, emotional, highly strung, can become distressed and irrational, easily upset, very reliant on Thomas' stability and strength

**Young Harriet Ibberson** their daughter, aged 8 at the start of the show. Optimistic, sometimes shy and quiet, observant, bright, eager to learn, curious, mentally old for her years, sensible, mature, quite tough, considerate, thoughtful, accepting of her position, not ambitious, very musical

**Frederick Seebohm** the wealthy owner of the house, 40s Brave, a little pompous, warm, friendly, attention seeking, extrovert, patriotic, generous, arrogant

**Mrs Seebohm** Frederick's wife, a charming hostess and well regarded lady of the house

**Young Charlotte Seebohm** his daughter, aged 8 at the start of the show Well-behaved, talented, driven and ambitious, a 'model' child, well-schooled, knowledgeable, slightly attention-seeking, a little haughty at times

**Older Harriet Ibberson** – a headteacher in her 30s Well-organised, proud, high standards, strict but warm, driven, ambitious

**Older Charlotte Seebohm** – a maid in her 30s Determined, reflective, sharp, intelligent, troubled, seeking a place to call her own, seeking a role in life, hard working, honest, genuine

**Ida Merrell** – head girl, takes the role seriously, confident and assured. Likes to be in charge

**Edith Cross** – daughter of Ellen Cross 'school girl suffragette'

**Other roles: dancers, soldiers, maids, butlers, cooks, school girls**

## Musicians:

- Jazz quartet
- 'School orchestra' and 'School choir'
- small chamber groups to accompany duos / trios
- offstage soloists / duos
- Solo bugle (trumpet or horn)
- 2 x solo pianists
- String trio
- finale ensemble

**Scene 1: The Party (written by Ben Critchley)**  
**Room H85**

**Cast:** Thomas, Frederick, Mrs Seebohm, Four dancers

Robert, Young soldier (Ben) - enters scene later

Party guests:

Rosina (Lula)

Iris (Evie)

Cordelia (Mary C)

Lilian (Emily S)

Harold (William)

(Dom and Rowan (in jazz band) also become soldiers)

*The year is 1914. A party takes place in a big downstairs room of Highbury House, a large Victorian house in Hitchin. The room has a fireplace and large windows. A Jazz band is playing and four dancers are dancing to the music. The atmosphere is jolly and upbeat. Thomas (the butler) is busy passing drinks and nibbles around, serving the guests. He is conscientious and very good at his work.*

*Frederick greets the audience as they arrive at the door. (NB can ad lib in character when talking to audience)*

**FREDERICK:** (as guests arrive – slightly flustered but very warm and welcoming) Welcome to Highbury House! Thank you so much for coming! Wonderful to see you. Come in, come in.... Please enjoy the music. There are drinks being served...through here...through here...

**MRS SEEBOHM** (is welcoming people into the room...chatting to guests – audience- as they arrive) 'Wonderful to see you...have you come far? Dreadful weather tonight...come in and have a drink...have you heard the news? We are all talking about the war...well, trying not to but...you know...carrying on as usual ...for now...

**ROSINA**(shouts above the music) Another wonderful party, Freddy!

**FREDERICK:** Thank you Rosina, Mrs Seebohm and I always felt Highbury was a grand party house, do you not think? And we don't know what's around the corner now do we...

**HAROLD** might as well enjoy ourselves while we still can, hey, Frederick?

**FREDERICK:** I'll drink to that!

**MRS SEEBOHM:** you'll drink to anything Freddy dear.... Oh there's Lillian...cooee...Lillian...I love your dress...  
(goes to talk to Lillian)

**FREDERICK:** Time for a spot of dancing I think!

**The dance starts and everyone makes space to watch – there is a small round of applause at the end then  
the dancers mingle with the guests**

**CORDELIA (TO FREDERICK):** Excuse me, Mister Seebohm...

**FREDERICK:** Hello Cordelia, not enjoying the party? Where's Clarence?

**CORDELIA:** Oh, his mother is ill Mr Seebohm...I was wondering...the war...what do you think that ....I mean...what's going to happen?

**FREDERICK:** I wish I knew Cordelia...but we are all hoping this sorry mess will be sorted by Christmas...

*More ad lib conversation between actors and integrating with guests.*

*Amidst the merriment, there is a knock at the window. Everyone ignores it. The knocking carries on and gets louder.*

*A young soldier (Robert) runs into the room...*

**ROBERT (SOLDIER) :** (shouts) War! War!

(The room falls silent)

**LILLIAN** I don't understand....

(Other guests look shocked and frightened...)

**ROBERT (SOLDIER):** (Shouting. With the aura of a mean person) Men! It is your duty to serve your country. You MUST enlist NOW!

(A lone bugle sounds from distant place. In silence, Harold, the male dancer (Lewis), 2 members of the jazz trio (Dom and Rowan) don army hats and jackets and stand in line as if ready for instructions).

**FREDERICK:** (steps forward to join them) I'm ready to play my part. I would like to enlist.

**ROBERT:** That's the spirit! Just what we want.

*Walks up to Frederick and realises he's an older man*

**ROBERT:** May I ask, how old are you Sir?

**FREDERICK:** (*with pride*) Forty two

**ROBERT:** That's too old to enlist sir.

*Frederick is clearly shaken and shocked. Thomas has hidden at the back of the room. Trying to remain unnoticed. Someone points him out...*

**ROSINA** (in a panic – trying to help) That man looks the right age! Why aren't you coming forward? Step up!

**THOMAS:** I ... don't ... thi...

**ROBERT:** Come on man! Step up

*Thomas slowly walks over to the rest of the soldiers, puts on his jacket and helmet and joins the line as the lights dim to blackness. The 3 men soldiers bow heir heads. The bugler plays again as the scene ends.*

**MRS SEEBOHM** (to audience) The party is over. I'm terribly sorry...please follow me....

Scene 2 written by Lucy Carmichael

Room (H84) Charlotte's nursery / bedroom

**Cast: Harriet, Charlotte, Mary-Anne, Thomas, soldier**

HARRIET and CHARLOTTE sit playing with a music box and singing. They won't settle down as they are too excited about the party in the next room.

**CHARLOTTE:** I saw her dress Harriet and it was so beautiful

**HARRIET:** ....and on the arm of the handsome gentleman.. Charlotte, do you think we will ever get married?

**CHARLOTTE:** to each other? (they both giggle)

**HARRIET:** No, I mean, do you think we will each marry a gentleman and have a family of our own?

**CHARLOTTE:** I shall marry a gentleman Harriet. But I rather think you might marry a...

**HARRIET:** a cook? A King?

**CHARLOTTE:** A cook would feed you well and king might be very rich, but I was rather thinking that you will marry a musician...

**HARRIET:** yes, a musician would be very fine

**MARY-ANNE** enters and tries to get them into bed but they don't listen.

**MARY-ANNE:** (slight, pauses, hands on hips as she views the scene then raising her voice to be heard above the girls' singing) Harriet! Miss Charlotte! Girls I know you are excited but I really must insist you go to bed.

**CHARLOTTE:** (Imploringly) Oh Mary-Anne please let me and Harriet stay up for five more minutes. Five minutes is all I ask for.

**MARY-ANNE:** Now Miss Charlotte I seem to remember saying 'bed in five minutes' ten minutes ago.

**HARRIET:** (Sweetly.) Please mother!

**CHARLOTTE:** Yes, please Mary-Anne!

**MARY-ANNE:** Girls I really must insist..... (Cut off by a loud noise from outside in the hallway.)

(THOMAS bursts through the door with an army cap rammed on his head. He is shaken. HARRIET and CHARLOTTE stop singing and swivel their heads round to see what all the noise is about. THOMAS rushes to scoop MARY-ANNE and HARRIET into a tight embrace.)

**MARY-ANNE:** (Shocked and confused.) Tho...Thomas what... what's happening? Why.. the uniform....but surely..?

**THOMAS:** (Rushed.) We're at war, they dragged me into it Mary-Anne.

**HARRIET:** Father, do you have to fight in this horrid war? (Clings to him)

**MARY-ANNE:** but... you know you hate fighting...your values Thomas...*our* values....

**THOMAS:** I have no choice Mary-Anne...no one has a choice...(turns to HARRIET with a forced attempt at bravery) Don't you worry about me my darling girl...(he pauses as if lost for comforting words) I'll be back before you can miss me, by Christmas even, I'm sure of it! Everyone says the war will be over by Christmas don't they?

(THOMAS and MARY-ANNE exchange worried looks)

(THOMAS takes a key on a chain from his pocket and loops it over HARRIET'S head)

**HARRIET:** What's this?

*Music intro starts here....*

**THOMAS:** It's the key to my heart and I need you to keep it safe.

**Key to my heart song (music by Dom & words by Teah)**

(In the corridor a sergeant major (ROBERT) is shouting for the last recruits to 'get a move on')

**THOMAS:** Before I go I want to make sure you do three very important things for me: keep yourself, your mother and the key safe; stay with your best friend (gestures to CHARLOTTE); and keep singing our song. Will you promise to do that for me Harriet?

**HARRIET:** Yes Father of course but...

**ROBERT (SOLDIER):** (from off stage) Hurry up ....they're leaving without us.

**THOMAS:** I need to say goodbye...keep singing for me, yes? I'll never be far away....I'll hear you...somehow...

**Farewell Song: (music & words by Livvy Trezise)**

Lights dim....

Audience are lead towards the kitchen as a distance 'pots and pans' percussive sound is heard starting up...

Scene 3 (the kitchen and corridor)

Written by Megan Devine and Lula Peacock

**Cast: Mary-Anne, Frederick, Younger Harriet, Younger Charlotte, Mrs Seebohm**

**Maids / cooks**

Winifred (Emily S)  
Eleanor (Mary C)  
Meg (Evie)  
Alice (Lula)  
Doris (Ella)  
Florence (Zoe / Sammy)

**Butlers**

Norman (William)  
Arnold (Ben)  
8 percussionists

The audience enter the corridor around the small kitchen – some of the audience will be on wide risers and can view from the top looking down. Small ‘scenes’ are performed by different servants, overlapping each other. This also creates the bustling atmosphere. A Christmas tree is positioned next to the stairs, and some of the servants are busy decorating it.

**WINIFRED:** (To Arnold) Could you come and hang this up for me?

**ARNOLD:** Right on it!

**ALICE:** (While stirring a bowl) The pudding mix is almost ready!

**FLORENCE:** (Observes the bowl) just a few more stirs should do it.

**ELEANOR:** Does anyone have the star?

**NORMAN:** I’ve got it! (Places it on the top of the Christmas tree)

**DORIS:** What is the time?

**MEG:** Nearly 4.

**DORIS:** Oh! I nearly forgot to put the potatoes in the oven!

(A servant begins to drum the beat of the song with pieces of kitchen equipment. The servants layer up rhythms to create the song. Mary-Ann begins to sing and everyone joins in as they happily string decorations or ‘play’ different parts of the kitchen.)

**WINIFRED** (To Arnold): It’s not straight you know – its wonky Arnold!

**ARNOLD:** well which way does it need to go Winifred?

**ALICE** (peers into the bowl): I’m wondering if it needs more nuts....

**FLORENCE:** Maybe a bit more peel? Here, let me have a stir....

**ELEANOR:** That’s looking lovely, that is!

**NORMAN:** not as lovely as you Miss Eleanor – come and give me kiss under the mistletoe now! (everyone laughs as Eleanor blushes)

**DORIS:** is ANYONE else keeping eye on the time? I’ve got spuds in the oven you know...

**MEG:** stop fretting Doris – its Christmas– it’ll all work out just fine in the end!

(Then, beginning at one side of the corridor, people stop singing and dramatic lighting is placed over the servant at the top of the stairs who begins with the letter explaining Thomas' death. The letter is passed from one servant to another, and, as it is passed down the stairs by other servants, the silence also spreads. The event should draw the audience's attention gradually, until everyone is staring at it.)

**ELEANOR (1<sup>st</sup> servant to hold the letter):** (Reads it and makes a shocked face. Passes the letter on)

**ALICE (2<sup>nd</sup> servant to hold the letter):** (Reads it and gasps out loud. They pass it on)

**NORMAN (3<sup>rd</sup> servant to hold the letter):** (Reads letter) Oh! Oh dear! (Reads on) Oh dear god... (Passes the letter to another servant)

**FLORENCE (4<sup>th</sup> servant to hold it):** (Also reads letter) No...I can't believe it!

**NORMAN:** ...(reads it) Who's going to tell Mary-Ann?

(The servants begin to whisper Mary-Ann's name. The whispers get louder as the music gets softer, until it abruptly stops as the Meg (5<sup>th</sup> servant) takes the letter from Florence)

**MEG:** (To Mary-Ann) It's for you Mary-Anne. It's about Thomas. (Reluctantly passes the letter to Mary-Ann, who was preoccupied with hanging decorations and missed the conversation before)

(Mary-Ann scans the letter and screams, bursting into tears.

**HARRIET:** mother? Mother what is it? (rushes to her)

**MRS SEEBOHM & FREDERICK** enter

**MRS SEEBOHM:** (concerned) what on earth is going on?

Mary-Ann sobs helplessly into the shoulder of Mrs Seebohm. Mrs Seebohm takes the letter from her, reads it then hands it silently to FREDERICK

**MRS SEEBOHM:** (soothingly) Shh dear... shh...

(Mary-Anne lets out a sob, then breaks away and runs up the stairs, followed by a confused and scared Harriet. Fredrick reads the letter for all to hear.)

**FREDERICK:** (gravely, as he reads the letter)

Dear Madam... it is my painful duty to inform you that a report has this day been received from the War Office notifying the death of number 26415. Rank; Corporal. Name; Thomas Matthew Ibberson. Regiment; 1<sup>st</sup> Herts. This occurred at 11am on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1914 and I am to express the sympathy and regret of the Army Council at your loss. The cause of death was 'Killed in Action'.

(Fredrick carefully, slowly folds the letter and puts it into his pocket.)

**FREDERICK:** (Talking to himself more than anyone else) So hard to read these words.... he was a pacifist...he never wanted to fight...that man was not a fighter, he was...(he pauses)....so young....These men who give all for our king and country ...and die in the mud. God bless Thomas, God bless them all... (he puts his head in his hands)



(The audience are ushered up the stairs by the servants as they gradually begin to go about their business again, this time without any laughter or joy.)

Scene 4 - by Lucy Carmichael

Room: a smaller quiet upstairs room in the servants quarters

**Cast: Harriet, Mary-Anne, Meg (servant)**

The day after telegram received. Audience stand in 'L' shape along back and left walls. MARY-ANNE and HARRIET try to comfort each other; MARY-ANNE sits in a chair with HARRIET at her feet.

The atmosphere is heavy with grief - there are long silences where mother and daughter are alone with their thoughts trying to come to terms with what has happened. The conversation is stilted and broken. The audience should feel a little uncomfortable, as if they are intruding on something very personal and intimate – not something the 'public' would usually see. Neither Harriet nor Mary-Anne are 'at their best' as they struggle with their grief and shock and though they know they should be comforting one another, they are angry at Thomas's death and snap at one another in their private pain.

**HARRIET:** (Sniffing) Mother..... but are you sure? Do they know? He said.....he said he'd come home...

MARY-ANNE is silent

**HARRIET:** But.. how ..and ...

**MARY-ANNE** (snaps) I don't know 'how' HARRIET...or when... or where ...or why. I don't know why...(she trails off)

**HARRIET:** Sorry,....I...

**MARY-ANNE:** too many questions Harriet...I cannot answer...

(There is a long awkward silence)

**HARRIET:** I wonder....

**MARY-ANNE**...shh...please...no questions....

HARRIET hums KEY TO MY HEART quietly)

**MARY-ANNE:** (Snappy) What's that? Please ...don't... please stop it...

(HARRIET stops..then starts again)

**HARRIET:** I can't help it; something inside me just needs to let it out.....its his song, mother,...please? (Sings song properly)

(MARY-ANNE gets up, turns her back on HARRIET and walks to the window. Piano starts to play along with the singing even though no one can be seen playing it.)

**MARY-ANNE:** I *know* its his song – please stop.... you aren't a little girl anymore. (appeals to HARRIET) Look, its just us Harriet - we've got to find a way to...

**HARRIET:** to what mother?

**MARY-ANNE;** To...to...oh, I don't KNOW what we need to do, but please stop singing that wretched song – I can't bear it....

**HARRIET:** (Glares at her mother) Father told me to sing the song. He told me that before he left...he said...he; hear it..that...

**MARY-ANNE:** (interrupts) you selfish child....just stop it right now...

(HARRIET defiantly keeps singing)

**MARY-ANNE** (throws something in a violent gesture. She is angry, irrational and overcome with grief.) Right – sing if you must – stay here and sing on your own (she storms out and we hear the door lock)

(HARRIET keeps signing as MARY-ANNE locks the door. After a short time, muffled shouts of 'fire' can be heard from the kitchen downstairs. HARRIET stops singing and tries to open the door. Realising it is locked, she runs to the window and tries to open it, shouting for help. She cries for her mother to come back, as the shouts outside grow louder.... As 'smoke' fills the room HARRIET starts to cough....at last a servant (**MEG**) unlocks the door, gets the audience out quickly and drags HARRIET out of the room to safety)

Scene 5 - Written by Rosie Morgan-Males

Room H92

*Audience walk through curtains of music notes to be met by an assistant teacher. '30 years later is projected' on the wall opposite.*

**Meg** (shows the prospective parents into the head-teachers office. She has assumed a 'neutral' serving role in the 30 years that have passed). In here please; the headmistress will be with you shortly. (*MEG exits the scene*)

'The Parents' (audience) are met by a group of girls who are standing/sitting talking quietly, not noticing the parents.

**Ida (Head girl):** Where is Miss Seebohm? She said she would be here by now. I wonder where she is?

**Anna:** Relax Ida, I'm sure she will be here soon, now while we are waiting what should we do?

**Ida: (Cutting in)** Practice! We should Practice, it needs to be perfect.

**Louise:** No, no we have practiced way too much. I'm more that certain that we are ready Ida.

**Edith:** I could tell you about the time my Mother met Emily Davison!

**Ida:** Oh, Edith we have heard that so many times. I practically know it off by heart now! I think she was an incredible woman, look even Mrs Seebohm thinks so, but I definitely think we should practice, anyway I'm head girl and I make the decisions!

**Hazel:** Come on Ida, I want to hear it again, your Mother is such an inspiration, go on Edith.

**Betty:** Yes definitely, I love the story Edith, if you don't want to listen Ida, don't, but don't spoil it for the rest of us.

**Ida: (Quietly – a but sulky)** Fine .....

**Edith:** Okay, here goes.

*The girls sit down at the edge of the room with Edith sitting in the middle maybe on Piano stool? Anna comes out and sits on a chair with a piece of paper and a pencil, she pretends to write.*

**Edith:** She was waiting at a train station, rushing her homework when in walked a lady, **(Louise walks in with a sash over her school uniform)**. She sat down next to her and started to talk **(Louise sits down and pulls up a chair)** She said her name was Emily Davison, Yes, THE Emily Davison! My Mother then found out that Emily was leading a meeting later that evening.

**Hazel:** I love this part! You know when...

**Betty:** Shhhh! Carry on Edith.

*Louise and Anna go and sit with rest of the girls.*

**Edith:** So, she rushed home and begged my Granny to let her go. When she finally was allowed to go my Mother had the best time of her life. Oh, how I wish I could have been there! She was so inspired she said! After that, My Mothers life was a whirl of going to meetings, petitions, campaigns and She even met Mrs Pankhurst. She was so lucky!

**Hazel:** I didn't know she met Mrs Pankhurst, can you just imagine, it must have been incredible!

*Charlotte suddenly enters*

**Charlotte:** Girls, what are you doing! This is no way to behave with parents here. *(Girls rush to their choir places, Charlotte to audience, as if they are a group of prospective parents)* Welcome to Highbury School, it is a pleasure to be showing you around today. A group of our students have prepared a song for you.

### SONG

Music by Finn Scourfield, words by Evie Sheldon

#### Verse 1

We are the children of Highbury School  
We excel in things we do  
English, history, geography  
And mathematics too

**Perfect, Well behaved  
first verse.**

#### Chorus

We always try our best  
We revise for our tests  
We are always well-dressed  
We respect all the guests

**Small  
mischievous  
touches e.g.  
pushing pinching  
pulling hair ect.**

#### Verse 2

We always wait in line for lunch  
And we never skip the queue  
We behave in every lesson

When we have a guest like you!

**Repeat chorus**

**Verse 3**

**Throw  
Paper  
Plane**

Every year we do a sports event  
We also do a play  
And we make our bedrooms really neat  
Every night and day

**Repeat chorus**

**Outro:** This is what we do at Highbury School

At the end the triangle player forgets to play. After being glared at by Charlotte she remembers to play after the song finishes.

Towards the end there is a knock at the door. Children keep singing. There is another, louder, knock and the singing stops.

**CHARLOTTE:** Delightful girls – quite delightful....such...’raw’...talent.... (another knock) My apologies... I will just go and see who that is.

Opens door

**CHARLOTTE:** (a little impatiently) Hello, can I help you?

**HARRIET:** I’m looking for the headteacher ...please....

**CHARLOTTE:** I am the head teacher, I’m afraid I’m rather busy right..... (Harriet cuts in)

**HARRIET:** I’m sorry to interrupt, I didn’t know...I...(she pauses and looks carefully at Charlotte – the penny drops)

**CHARLOTTE:** Do I ....know you... you look familiar....

**HARRIET:** Well, we once knew each other, Charlotte....

***The two women embrace***

**CHARLOTTE:** Harriet ....my goodness...of course! How *are* you? Let me look at you ....

**HARRIET:** Very well thank you Charlotte... and you?

**CHARLOTTE:** Yes yes...but we have so much to catch up on. Just a moment...let me sort out the parents (***She points to a notice on the wall that says ‘School Rules’ with a ‘fake’ smile to parents ...***) Here are the school rules, these are very important to this school so please do feel free to commit them to memory whilst you are here.

Now then – that’ll keep them occupied for a bit... where were we? Harriet...my dear friend...the strangest thing.... the other day I was going through some boxes and found something you may be interested to see

*(she walks to a drawer and takes out an envelope full of newspaper clippings)*. It was terribly hard to read these – but ...you're the closet I have to family now Harriet. Can I share them with you? Please?

**HARRIET:** It's fine ...of course...I knew that coming here ...it would be difficult.

**CHARLOTTE** Yes...but you were brave to come and.....here, take a look....

**HARRIET:** *(Stands and stares at newspaper for a few seconds)* I'll... I'll just take this outside, I am very sorry to interrupt like this....

*Harriet goes outside to the corridor and sits down. She starts to read the newspaper.*

**HARRIET:** 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1914. FOUR PERISH IN CHRISTMAS TRAGEDY

A great fire broke out last night at the grand home of MR FREDERICK SEEBOHM. The deceased include Mrs Seebohm and three servants by the names of Annie, Rose and ...(Harriet pauses) Mary-Anne. It was thought that the fire broke out in the kitchen as the staff prepared for the festivities. *(Harriet scans down the rest of the newspaper until she reaches the bottom and continues to read)* Mary-Anne's daughter, 9-year-old Harriet survived with minor injuries due the quick actions of a servant.

*Harriet sadly puts the newspaper in her lap. She places her head in her hands a few seconds later she composes herself she picks up the remaining newspaper.*

**HARRIET:** 19th of September 1940. Fredrick Seebohm, owner of Highbury house has died aged 50 after a short illness. He leaves behind his daughter, Charlotte Seebohm who inherits Highbury House. Rumours have been heard that she is to open a school in the former family home.

**HARRIET:** You lost your family too....I'm so sorry I didn't know.

**CHARLOTTE:** *(Who has been watching the scene unfold)* There is no way you could have known....you went to live in Norfolk didn't you....

**HARRIET:** Yes....a nice family – my mother's second cousin...they took good care of me.....But Charlotte, I am looking for work and I am a hard worker....I was drawn back here...perhaps the memories....too many memories...too many ghosts...

**CHARLOTTE:** No ghosts Harriet – we are a happy school and I could do with another person to look after the girl...

*(Her father's song starts to play faintly as if on an old record player)*

**HARRIET:** (grips Charlotte's arm) Charlotte, can you hear that?

**CHARLOTTE:** Hear what? (the song stops)

**HARRIET:** Oh no sorry it was nothing. Must have just been *(A clock chimes, several girls run out of the room)*

**IDA:** (yells from the classroom) Miss, may we be dismissed?

**CHARLOTTE:** Yes certainly...back to your rooms please.

**All Girls:** Yes Miss *(They leave)*

**CHARLOTTE:** Harriet - go to the big dormitory - Ida will be there and show you around... take these parents too. *(Harriet, Ida and Audience leave)*

Scene 6 - written by Rosie Morgan-Males

The 'French' Room H89

**Cast:** Ida (head girl), Harriet

**School girls:** Ruby (Sophie / Emma Louise), Margaret (Teah / Lien), Lizzie (Lula), Connie (Evie), Cecilia (Mary)

**Soldiers –** Sergeant Robert, (Ben) Edward (Finn), Arthur (Harry), Wilf (Rowan), Harold (William)

Rostra with 6 bed ends across. A large school dormitory. (Later these beds turn into trenches) The younger girls are dancing on the beds.

**HARRIET:** Why are you dancing, shouldn't you be in bed?

**RUBY:** *(Maliciously)* Who are you?

**MARGARET:** Are you a maid? You can't tell us what to do

**LIZZIE:** Yeah, we do what we want in here...

**CONNIE:** This is our dorm room so we do what we want, right?

**RUBY:** That's right, you tell her Cecilia

**CECELIA:** Should I tell you what we did to our last Dorm Matron?

**ALL Girls:** We don't like dorm matrons.

**CECELIA:** So, we went down to Garden *(Closing in around Harriet – perhaps they gather hands and circle around her)*

**MARGARET:** And captured a frog from the pond!

**LIZZIE:** Then, when she wasn't looking

**CONNIE:** And put it down her shirt!

**RUBY:** It was slimy and cold. It was incredible! She screamed like a mad thing!

**CECELIA:** So, there you go. Just giving you the warning!

*Ida enters suddenly*

**IDA:** Girls, Girls what are you doing? *(sees Harriet – addresses her with extraordinary confidence)* Excuse me, what are you doing here? Just to let you know that I am the head girl and it is my role to tell everyone what to do. Is that understood? Now then Girls go to bed this instant or I will be fetching Miss Seebohm!

**GIRLS:** *(Sarcastically)* Yes Ida

**IDA:** Sorry girls what did you say? What do you have to call me in front of adults?

**GIRLS:***(Bored)* Yes Ida Meller, Head Girl of Highbury School.

**IDA:** Thank you *(Leaves)*

*(Girls take no notice of Ida and continue to dance and sing. Harriet tries again.)*

**HARRIET:** *(Anxiously)* Sorry.... I need you to listen to me.

*Harriet suddenly recognizes the song*

**HARRIET:** Wait .... where do you know that song from?

**RUBY:** Well, we hear it at night. It's weird...like a really old fashioned song....

**LIZZIE:** it's a stupid song....oh...what's the problem? *(Harriet starts crying)* We were only having a bit of fun....

**HARRIET:** *(bitter and a little scared)* Don't...please stop....you don't understand what that song means to me...

**A school bell rings and the girls suddenly rush to the door leaving Harriet alone and shocked**

*Girls leave through the door, suddenly marching is heard. Harriet starts to speak.*

**HARRIET:** *(quietly...though clearly disturbed)* My god... my father's song.... *(getting louder)* I shouldn't have come ...'stop that singing you selfish girl' *(she recalls her mothers words)* ....father...what really happened father? How did you die? When? Where? Were you alone? Were you brave? Or did you die...shaking like a child....crying for his mother....'stop that singing' *(she can hear the girls off stage singing the song in a mocking tone....she sinks to her knees in renewed grief with hands over her eyes)*

*Suddenly the soldiers and Thomas enter the room in formation.*

Blackout: set is changed, 2 crew members come out and bring the sheet over the trenches revealing the trenches.

Over the blackout:

**SERGEANT ROBERT:** Right soldiers, for King and for Country!

**SOLDIERS:** For King and for Country!

**SERGEAT ROBERT:** Thomas, Thomas! Come on!

*Blackout ends soldiers are lined up with the sergeant walking in front of them.*

**SERGEAT ROBERT** Soldiers, Salute!

*Soldiers all salute*

**SERGEANT ROBERT:** Other hand Harold. *(not a comic moment...the error reveals the lack of experience of the men)*

**HAROLD:** Sergeant.

**SERGEAT ROBERT:** *(to audience)* You too!

**WILF:** What are we actually doing Sergeant?

**ARTHUR:** Remember he told us, we have marching practice. (...a little reminiscent of Head Girl...everyone is taking orders from someone at this point in the play...)

**HAROLD:** Lets get started then, I'm ready! *(Starts Marching)*

**SERGEANT ROBERT:** Stop, we all start together.

**HAROLD:** Sorry Sergeant.

**SERGEANT ROBERT:** And on the other leg

**WILF:** Sorry Sergeant.

**SERGEANT ROBERT:** Opposite arm to leg.

**EDWARD:** Sorry Sergeant.

**SERGEANT ROBERT:** *(Sighs)* Right so *(Sees Thomas Sitting down he has been the lookout)* What's wrong Thomas?

**THOMAS:** (shouts) Sergeant .... German Attack!

*Gun Shots and all soldiers fall.*

*Music starts again, Harriet suddenly notices them.*

**HARRIET:** *(distraught)* Father, Father is that you *(She sees Thomas' injuries)* No, no this cannot be happening, you will be ok, I know it, I can save you *(There is no reaction from Thomas)* Please, you can survive. Don't Leave me again, please, please *(desperate)*

**THOMAS:** Look after the key to my heart, you have to. *(He quietly dies in her arms)*

**MARY-ANNE:** *(From the Attic)* Harriet, Harriet! (this ghostly voice may be incorporated into the electronic sound scape)

In a trance Harriet stumbles out of the room up to the attic.

*(TBC how to move the audience up to the attic...)*

Scene 7 - Written by Megan Devine

Room - Attic

*Fire music by Polina Voinova*

*Instrumental only - solo piano, maybe with string parts*

**Cast Mary-Anne as ghost, Harriet, 4 fire dancers**

(The audience hear a haunting voice coming from the attic calling for Harriet. Faint sounds from the scene 4 fire can be heard, like a warning about what is going to happen next. They are taken upstairs to the attic room



and form a semi-circle by the wall, facing the library door. They leave a gap at the door into the room, through which Harriet steps, drawn towards the voice)

**MARY-ANNE:** (In a haunting, yet enticing voice) Harriet? Harriet, is that you? Come to me Harriet...

(Harriet walks towards the library door, which is shut. A cold light is turned on over Mary-Ann who is visible from the small window. Harriet is now past the point of insanity, and she now believes that everything she is seeing is real.)

**HARRIET:** Mother? Mother! (She runs towards the library) Mother! Why are you here? I thought... I thought you were... . Oh mother! I've missed you so (she shakes the handle of the door). Trapped.... I can never forget what you did to me....trapped.....a young child...trapped in a room as a fire spread ... but.... I have forgiven you Mother.... my life was saved and I have forgiven you....

(Harriet puts here hand to the window, and Mary-Ann does the same. It looks like they are holding hands through the door.)

(All of a sudden, the cold light turns red, to symbolise fire. We will project flames onto the library walls at this point. Harriet is stunned, and stumbles backwards.)

*The fire dance begins, choreography tbc.*

(Harriet is frantic, trying to get her mother out of the burning room when she realises the key might open the door. She holds up the key and the dancers retreat and hide away again, but the light is still red, as the fire hasn't stopped. Harriet takes multiple, frantic attempts to get the key in the lock, but eventually succeeds. Once the door is unlocked Harriet steps away and Mary-Ann walks out carrying a small locked box which she gives to Harriet. Mary-Ann disappears into the library and Harriet drops the music and runs out the fire exit, because the fire is still there and she is terrified)

(The dancers (?) turn and direct the audience out of the room. The audience go down the stairs, on to scene 8, by following the dancers (?) who guide them...)

Scene 8 - written by Sophia Leete  
Outside - in the garden under the tree

(After rushing down from the attic at the sight of her mother, Harriet sits under a large willow tree in the garden. She is crying)

Cast: Charlotte & Harriet

**CHARLOTTE (comes to find Harriet)** Harriet?

HARRIET sobs quietly by the tree. She as put the box behind her, half hidden

**CHARLOTTE (sits down next to her)**

Its hard, yes? Coming back? Harder than you thought?

**HARRIET:** I thought...I heard....I saw...I don't know.. the attic....what's in the attic Charlotte?

**CHARLOTTE:** Junk mainly...much of it was destroyed during the fire. Your father ...Thomas...he asked my father if he could store some things up there before he left ...for the war. There was a box – a locked box. Its still there ....I don't have a key to it...I don't know what is inside it but I've kept it....

**HARRIET:** Its here – I have it Charlotte...(she puts the box in front of Charlotte. She puts her hand to the key around her neck) ...I wonder....

The key turns easily in the lock. Harriet opens the box and takes out sheet music. Charlotte picks it up.

**Charlotte:** Look at this....

**HARRIET:** Music? He wrote this? (they look at the scores)

**CHARLOTTE:** Its good...did you not know he wrote music Harriet?

**HARRIET:** I had no idea...he was always singing and playing the piano...he had taught himself as a little boy, I know that much...he used to play all the time on the piano at his school ...but...well, he was a butler...

**CHARLOTTE:** A gifted one....

**HARRIET:** My mother must have known...she couldn't bear to hear me singing after he was killed ...

**CHARLOTTE:** You know, once the war ended, I tried to take all music out of my life...it felt too painful, after all we had been through...music touches you too deeply. But I could never really forget about it completely. Wherever I went it would always find me somehow....

**HARRIET** I still miss my father, Charlotte. I miss his singing too...

(She whispers this as though she is ashamed and wants no-one to hear what she has just said)

**CHARLOTTE** I know, but look – he has left us something.... look at how fine this music is....

(MUSIC in background starts playing for final song)

**HARRIET** Charlotte...you and I were always singing...do you ever wish you had become a musician?

**CHARLOTTE** Every day.

**SONG (by Livvy Trezise)**  
**'Looking back'**

(There is a short pause before an idea springs to Charlotte's mind and she starts to smile)

**CHARLOTTE** Well ...lets do it...

**HARRIET:** What do you mean?

**CHARLOTTE** (excitedly) Lets start now... Let's re-open the school ...as a music service...for the community....for all the villages...for all the people like your father who never had the chance....

**HARRIET** But Charlotte....

**CHARLOTTE** music lessons....choirs.... classes...orchestras...we can put on concerts....Harriet, this has been our dream since we were children. I'm not doing it without you.

(Her voice is firm and as the women embrace, a smile creeps onto Harriet's face. The audience start to hear music coming from the stairs to the fire escape behind - **Scene 9, the finale**. Here we see Mary-Anne and Thomas reunited as ghosts, the full cast come together. Cast perform medley of 4 songs in the show as they appear come down the stairs and round the corners; there are instruments and lanterns all around. The cast take their bows)

End