

THE BUTTONHOLE BANDIT

Book and Lyrics by Fengar Gael

Music by Michael Silversher

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CHARACTERS

FROM THE PLANET EARTH

PHOEBE POTTS, a precocious child of seven
HOWARD POTTS, Phoebe's father, an insurance salesman
MILDRED POTTS, Phoebe's mother, an accountant

FROM THE GALAXY CLESTO

MELF THE GELF
ALPHOS
NARBOT
VIZEER VOLSPAR
XANTHEES
QWERKISS
BRELLEYA
PHOBEE MOTH

NOTE: Phoebe's Closet can be performed by an ensemble cast of six actors.

SUGGESTED DOUBLING:

Howard Potts / Alpho s/ Xanthees
Mildred Potts / Phobee Moth
Vizeer / Qwerkiss.

TIME

the present

PLACE

A home in a city suburb and the five planets of the Galaxy Clesto:
Gelvos, Tobos, Brelluma, Mollbath, and Vucuma. A stylized set represents
the interior of a living room with a closet that contains clothing, sporting equipment,
and hidden access to the Clesto Galaxy. The planets may be suggested by colorful fabrics
that transform the surface of the stage

SCENE 1: THE CLOSETING

(The Potts family living room. Eerie, echoing voices are heard singing as the closet door opens and a bowling ball emerges, rolling to the center of the stage. Inside the closet, boots begin tapping and hats gyrate while coat sleeves beckon to the music.)

ECHOING VOICES

*Where the door is always open,
Where the walls are growing wide;
Step into my closet,
There's a universe
Inside.*

(The bowling ball rolls back into the closet, and the door slams shut to a loud clap of thunder. PHOEBE enters, shivering, wearing gloves and carrying an umbrella.)

PHOEBE

Brrrrrr...

(Another crack of thunder is heard as PHOEBE shrieks, dropping to her knees, her hands covering her head.)

PHOEBE

Yiiiiiii!!! Stop! Please, please, stop! Now, relax, relax, don't panic, breathe deeply,...walk to the closet,...open the door,...put away your hat, your gloves. Wh...what's that?! Shoo! Shoo! You moldy old moth!

(PHOEBE grasps the umbrella and pursues the moth around the room, then into the closet.)

PHOEBE

Go away! Go away! Get out of there!!

(PHOEBE follows the moth into the closet, and the door slams shut! HER shrill scream is heard, then fades to a whimper.)

PHOEBE

Ahhhhhhhiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii...

SCENE 2: THE CALAMITIES

(Phoebe's mother, MILDRED POTTS, enters the house carrying bags of groceries.)

MILDRED POTTS

Yoo hoo, Phoebe, darling, I'm home! (*pause*) Oh, Phoebe, where are you? Phoebeeeeeee!!

(MILDRED dashes off as HOWARD POTTS enters, whistling. Soon MILDRED returns.)

MILDRED POTTS

Howard, I can't find Phoebe! I've looked everywhere; she's not in the house!

HOWARD POTTS

No need to panic. Her bike's in the garage so she obviously made it home -- which is no small feat considering the traffic. Did you check the back yard? There was a thunderstorm earlier. While it's highly unlikely, she may have been struck by...

MILDRED POTTS

No, no, she's not there either! Maybe one of her classmates came by and they left...?

HOWARD POTTS

Impossible! We've drilled her a thousand times to *never* answer the door till we return.

MILDRED POTTS

Yes, it's not like Phoebe to leave on her own. She's always called to get permission, and she's such a timid child.

HOWARD POTTS

She's not timid; she's sensible! What with the polluted air, contagious germs, and that vicious dog of the Grimley's. Remember, Mildred: calamity threatens everywhere, even in the sanctity of our homes. Look at poor Huey Flanagan who tripped on the garden hose; and little Wendy Wang who ate the potted poinsettia; and let's not forget your nephew, Gerald, who found those matches under the sink and wiped out an entire neighborhood...

MILDRED POTTS

Oh, stop it, Howard! I'm worried sick without your raving on and on!

HOWARD POTTS

I'm *not* raving! In fact, I've been thinking of cataloging all possible childhood disasters, including diseases, and presenting a volume to Phoebe for...

MILDRED POTTS

No, no, I won't let you! She's frightened enough as it is. Why just yesterday she asked if there were any safe cities left in the country. Of course, I said, you just have to go out and find them. (*pause*) Oh, no! Oh, heavens, that's it! She ran away! Call the police, Howard! Call the police!!

HOWARD POTTS

Oh, for Pete's sake, get hold of yourself! Before we do anything rash, let's comb the neighborhood. You drive east down Lowden Street; I'll take Wisteria.

MILDRED POTTS

Wait! Where's my umbrella?

HOWARD POTTS

In the closet!

(MILDRED dashes to the closet, grasps the doorknob, then stops.)

MILDRED POTTS

Oh, I just remembered! I left it in the car!

HOWARD POTTS

We'll meet back here in twenty minutes.

(HOWARD and MILDRED exit.)

SCENE 3: BEYOND THE BUTTONHOLE

(Wind sounds are heard as the closet bursts open and a mist billows forth. The closet walls dissemble as streams of shimmering fabric unfurl, transforming the stage into an alien landscape where PHOEBE sits huddled, singing with a tremulous voice.)

PHOEBE

Where am I?

*Not a blade of grass,
Not a drop of rain,
Not a moon or a star,
Or an object to name.*

PHOEBE (cont'd)

*I'm somewhere
That's nowhere
That's never been found;
I'm somewhere
That's nowhere,
Just sky over ground.*

(A hideous MAMMOTH MOTH enters, crossing unseen behind PHOEBE who continues singing.)

PHOEBE

*Nothing flying above,
Nothing crawling below,
No footprints to follow
To places I know.*

*I'm somewhere
That's nowhere,
But where can it be?
For somewhere
Must be someplace
Because it's holding...*

MAMMOTH MOTH and PHOEBE

...me!

(PHOEBE turns and screams, then faints as the MAMMOTH MOTH disappears. Seconds later, MELF, a pale creature with pointed ears and large hands, creeps cautiously towards Phoebe, poking her shoulder. SHE awakens, shrieking with terror!)

PHOEBE

Yahhhhhhhhhh!!! Don't touch me! Go away! Go away!

(MELF shuffles off.)

PHOEBE

No! Wait! Wait! Come back! Please, come back! Did you see it? Over there. It was a...a huge hairy monster with...with black eyes and wings!

MELF

Nay, 'twas only thee and me.

PHOEBE

I'm really upset; my pulse is racing!

MELF

Where goeth this monster?

PHOEBE

How do I know? I don't even know where I am or who...who are you?

MELF

Melf the Gelf.

PHOEBE

Gelf? What's a Gelf?

MELF

A Gelfin folk from Gelvos, ancient orb of the Galaxy Clesto.

PHOEBE

What?! Am I on another planet?! The last thing I remember was chasing a moth into the closet. It flew through a buttonhole and then...

MELF

Presto: Clesto! Galaxy of the Nether Yon. Methinks thy buttonhole is one of the hop holes the universe maketh to bring creatures hither.

PHOEBE

I'm *not* a creature; I...I'm a human being.

MELF

Hast thou a name?

PHOEBE

Of course, but I can't tell just anyone, especially anyone weird. Look, there's obviously been a mistake. I'm not supposed to be here. I should be home -- on planet Earth!

MELF

"Earth?" Earth bringeth no nod to the memory pod.

PHOEBE

My parents will think I've been killed or kidnapped!

MELF

Parents? Prithee, tell me of "parents."

PHOEBE

They're mothers and fathers who bring children like me into the world. Then they raise them in houses till they're old enough to swim with the sharks.

MELF

"Sharks?" Tell me of sharks.

PHOEBE

They're giant meat-eating fish with sharp teeth. Look, it's just an expression my father uses. Anyway, I don't swim. I'm afraid of water.

MELF

Gelves needeth no parents. We sprout fully grown from glands in our hands.

PHOEBE

Really? I'm impressed -- now you've got to get me out of here! I'm already having palpitations 'cause it's starting to get dark, and if your climate includes thunder and lightning, then we've really got to get moving, and fast!

MELF

Then hasten to the planet's other face where beameth her eternal suns.

PHOEBE

You mean you have sunshine all day long?

MELF

Whatsoever you desire, we giveth thee, and a name bestowed that thou canst speak.

PHOEBE

Of course I can speak my name! (*pause*) Well, you seem harmless enough. I'm called Phoebe, Phoebe Potts.

MELF

With joy I taketh thee hither, fair Fleabee.

(MELF extends his hand toward PHOEBE who slaps it.)

MELF

Yowwww!

PHOEBE

It's Phoebe, not Fleabee! And don't shake hands! Sorry, but my father says most germs are transferred from the hands, and so far I've avoided measles, mumps, and only had one cold in eight years.

(MELF leads PHOEBE to an area filled with hand shaped trees and shrubbery.)

MELF

We Gelves clingeth close, beguiled by the Gelvinora blooms that changeth colors with the winds.

PHOEBE

Well, I don't "clingeth", and I hate changes of any kind. I like everything neat, tidy, and predictable. In fact, if I'm exposed to any radical changes -- like the time I went to camp -- I tend to hyperventilate. I've already fainted sixteen times, mostly from my allegies to peanuts and walnut, and... Oh, no, there's more of you!

(PHOEBE retreats as two more Gelves enter: ALPHOS and NARBOT.)

MELF

Feareth not my fellow Gelves, Alphos and Narbot, vassals to the Great Vizeer Volspar.

ALPHOS

Greetings!

NARBOT

Hark ye!

(THEY offer their hands, but PHOEBE smacks them with revulsion.)

ALPHOS and NARBOT

Yowwww!

MELF

She toucheth not our Gelfin hands.

NARBOT

Aye, she slappeth before I graspeth! Look, Alphos, she bringeth bumps and...

ALPHOS and NARBOT

...blisters!

PHOEBE

Oh, for Pete's sake, I barely touched you!

NARBOT

Thou art a glum chum, all skittery, twittery, and...

ALPHOS and NARBOT

...impossible to divine.

PHOEBE

If you're saying I'm impulsive, that's just plain crazy!

NARBOT

Thou hast raised thy voice.

ALPHOS

Thou art showing signs of fitfulness...

NARBOT and ALPHOS

...and fluster.

PHOEBE

Don't be silly! I *hate* fluster; I'm *never* excited! It's bad for my blood pressure!

NARBOT

Then thou willst find great refuge on Gelvos where all dwelleth in blissful...

MELF, NARBOT, ALPHOS

(singing in harmony)....harmony.

*Gelvinora nula nyla nay,
Gelfin gardens bloometh night and day.
Gelvinora nula nyla nun,
'Tis why the Gelves of Gelvos greet the sun;
'Tis why we probeth through the Gelfin night,
And seeketh past the darkness to the light.*

PHOEBE

Do you live in houses like we do on Earth?

ALPHOS

There be Gelvinora homes of Gelfin brick...

PHOEBE

And what about a hospital in case I get sick?

NARBOT

And Gelvinora cures for Gelfin sick...

PHOEBE

And do you have tuna sandwiches and normal trees and a place to wash my hands?

MELF, ALPHOS, NARBOT

*Gelvinora fish swim Gelfin seas,
From Gelvinora buds sprout Gelfin trees;
Gelvinora soap cleans Gelfin grime,
And thou hast heard a Gelvinora rhyme.*

ALPHOS

And with our Gelfin hands we clappeth and snappeth...

NARBOT

...and gropeth and stroketh.

ALPHOS

Aye! Harken, Narbot, thy fingers are a-fester with...

NARBOT and ALPHOS

...warts!

NARBOT

Thine as well!

ALPHOS

What bringeth this blight?

PHOEBE

Well, don't look at me! I've never had a wart in my life. You're the weirdoes. On Earth you'd be part of a freak show!

ALPHOS

Nay, nay, with these proud paws we feeleth more than other species. (*holding up his hand*) We perceiveth through thy flesh is thy bones,....

NARBOT

...thy brains,...

MELF

...thy liver, lungs, and a great crimson heart! Thou shalt live a full century!

PHOEBE

What?! You mean I'll live a hundred years?

ALPHOS

Precisely one hundred and three years and four months. Then thou shalt perish.

PHOEBE

That's ridiculous! I'm lucky to have lived this long! Nobody can see with their hands, and you certainly can't see through my skin.

NARBOT

Aye, and through brick and stone.

PHOEBE

I don't believe it! What's in my pocket?

NARBOT

A latchkey, and...

ALPHOS, NARBOT, MELF

...a gum ball!

PHOEBE

Amazing! But how can you know how long I'll live?

ALPHOS

'Tis the gift of Gelfin hands. Soon thou shalt grasp our Gelfin ways.

PHOEBE

A hundred and three years? You mean nothing can kill me before then?

MELF, NARBOT, ALPHOS

Nay.

PHOEBE

Wait till I tell my dad! He can stop buying me so much insurance.

MELF

"Insurance?" Prithee, tell us of insurance.

PHOEBE

My father sells it. People pay him money to protect themselves in case they die or lose their property. Is it possible to get hands like yours?

MELF

Aye, but they must be earned.

PHOEBE

Well, that should be easy. On Earth I'm a model student, a perfect child -- except for my phobias and the other kids hate me. So what do I have to do?

MELF

Dwelleteth on Gelvos in harmony, and contemplate the beauty of a single leaf from the limb of a flangee tree. Then thou must croooooon...

(ALPHOS and NARBOT demonstrate, holding a leaf and chanting a single tone throughout Melf's song.)

MELF

*Thou must gaze at the leaf,
Through the leaf find the veins,
Through the veins seek the seed
That will lead
Thee to heed
Thy fiiiiiire.*

ALPHOS and NARBOT

Crooooooooooooooooooooo...
Crooooooooooooooooooooo...
Crooooooooooooooooooooo...

PHOEBE

Well, it sounds simple enough. (*plucking a leaf*) I'll start gazing right now!

MELF

Wait! With gazing cometh questing. Thou must have a burning yearning.

PHOEBE

Oh, I've got a yearning alright. I want those hands so when I get back to Earth people will hire me to look through walls, through secret vaults, even through the ground. I'll find oil and diamonds and Egyptian mummies. Doctors, detectives, *everyone* will want me -- especially my dad! I'll tell his clients how long they'll live so they can plan their funerals and stop worrying about accidents or hurricanes or that giant asteroid he says is heading towards Earth. I'll be famous; I'll be rich; I'll even have my own TV show -- so let's get started!

(PHOEBE imitates Melf, chanting to the leaf.)

PHOEBE

*I must gaze at the leaf,
Through the leaf find the veins,
Through the veins seek the seed
That will lead
Me to heed
My fiiiiiire.*

MELF, NARBOT, ALPHOS

*Gelvinora nula nyla nee,
Through Gelvinora hands the eyes can see;
Gelvinora nula nyla name,
How shadows all hath shifted since she caaaaame.*

PHOEBE

Darn! This is so discouraging! I can see through the veins to the seeds all right, but why are the leaves always withering?

NARBOT

Prithee, Phoebe, canst thou peep through my pocket?

PHOEBE

Well, there's something small and flat: a handkerchief!

NARBOT and ALPHOS

Nay!

PHOEBE

It's something square and thin: a butter dish!

NARBOT and ALPHOS

Nay!

PHOEBE

A book?

NARBOT

Nay, nay!

NARBOT and ALPHOS

'Tis a mirror!

MELF

See thyself, fair Phoebe.

(As PHOEBE stares into the mirror, the MAMMOTH MOTH crosses from behind, causing her to drop it.)

PHOEBE

Ahhhhhiiiiiiiiii!!!

ALPHOS

Cease thy shrieking!

NARBOT

What ails thee?

PHOEBE

Did...did you see it?! It's that...that huge, hairy monster with black eyes!

MELF

Whither?

PHOEBE

It flew behind the dunes! Wait! It's back again! Look! Over there! Oh, darn, it's gone!
But you did see it, right?

ALPHOS and NARBOT

Nay!

MELF

I saw nothing!

PHOEBE

What?! Are you blind? How could you miss it?!

MELF

Hush, thou art all adither.

PHOEBE

Of course I'm "adither!" I can't believe you didn't see it! I told you where to look,
for Pete's sake!

ALPHOS

All beasts perished in bygone days.

NARBOT

'Tis impossible.

(Suddenly a loud humming is heard. MELF, ALPHOS and NARBOT respond, adding their own harmonies.)

PHOEBE

Wh...what's that?! What are you doing?!

MELF

The Vizeer Volspar cometh!

PHOEBE

Who?!

SCENE 4: THE BANISHMENT

(The humming intensifies as VIZEER VOLSPAR enters.
His hands are enormous, his voice commanding.)

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Hark ye! Our sister planets hath suffered grave calamities!

ALPHOS and NARBOT

Nay!

MELF

How so?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Fearsome windstorms on Brelluma and quakings on Tobos.

NARBOT and ALPHOS

Zounds!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

I feareth for our future. (*glancing towards Phoebe*) Something is awry.

PHOEBE

Well, don't look at me! I just got here; you don't even know who I am.

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Thou art Phoebe Potts!

MELF

Volspar hath powers that perceiveth through minds to memories.

PHOEBE

If you can see my memories, can you see my parents?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Aye, Howard and Mildred. And I see thee, thy life on Earth.

PHOEBE

Really?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Thou art a fearsome, solitary creature who gawketh at boxes with strange flickering forms and shrunken creatures like thyself.

PHOEBE

That's my tee vee and computer.

VIZEER VOLSPAR

In thy dwelling lie jumbles of fluff-filled beasts, miniatures like thyself, and orbs of many colors.

PHOEBE

Those are my toys. You Gelves wouldn't understand since you're born fully grown, but on Earth we grow in stages, and one of those stages is childhood. Part of childhood is playing with...

PHOEBE
...toys.

VIZEER VOLSPAR
Toys...

VIZEER VOLSPAR

...must be wondrous. Thine eyes are asparkle with memories of glee.

MELF

I wouldst like to have a childhood.

ALPHOS and NARBOT

Aye!

PHOEBE

Look, you can't just "have a childhood" because of some toys. You have to be young and have parents and grandparents. Then you have to be educated to find out what you do best so you can work and earn a living.

VIZEER VOLSPAR

(patting her head) And what dost thou do best?

PHOEBE

I don't know yet. If you're so smart, maybe you can tell me!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Nay, but thou are willful, with a cold mold in thy heart that maketh the Gelfin winds blow north and the Gelvinora blooms wither and rot.

PHOEBE

What?! Why, that's crazy!

ALPHOS

Aye, and she bringeth a plague that maketh nimble fingers grow...

NARBOT and ALPHOS

...a-fester with warts!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

(inspecting his hands) Warts?! Arrrrgh!

PHOEBE

Look, I had nothing to do with that! I can't spread plagues, and I certainly can't change winds or kill flowers...

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Silence! Every Gelf on Gelvos weaveth a web with every other Gelf and all things that flourish: the animals, the plants. All dwelleth in holy...

MELF, NARBOT, ALPHOS, VOLSPAR

...harmony...

(A wind howls.)

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Shhhh! Harken! Gelvos will grow black and barren as bone if thou stayeth past the hour. Thou must be banished!

PHOEBE

What do you mean "banished?" *(to Melf)* What does he mean?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Till the galaxy mendeth we must sendeth thee off!

PHOEBE

Look, I can't leave now! Not till I can see with my hands!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Goeth forth and restoreth the balance! The order! And the...

MELF, NARBOT, ALPHOS, VOLSPAR

...harmony...

PHOEBE

Me?! But how can I “restoresh” the...?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

First seeketh the planets Tobos and Brelluma.

PHOEBE

What?!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

From Brelluma flee thee to Mollbath and from Mollbath to Vucuma where tubular probes absorbeth the space betwixt galaxies. They canst deliver thee hence through thy hop-hole on Earth.

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Aye, ‘tis a dot near the blot on a chart of the lesser galaxies.

PHOEBE

Wow! You mean I’m going back home?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Only after thou cureth Clesto of chaos!

PHOEBE

Look, I don’t know how to “cureth” a cold much less...

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Silence! A Gelf must guideth Phoebe.

ALPHOS

Nay!

NARBOT and ALPHOS

Not I!

MELF

Nor I!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Then thou goest alone!

PHOEBE

Alone?!

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Alphos, Narbot, bringeth forth the windship!

(NARBOT and ALPHOS exit.)

PHOEBE

Windship? Wh...what's a windship?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

It rolleth on wafts of wind betwixt planets.

PHOEBE

You mean it's like a...a space ship? Forget it! The last time I flew somewhere I got so nervous they had to give me tranquilizers. I can't help it: I *hate* flying, and I especially hate flying alone to places I've never been!

(NARBOT and ALPHOS enter with the windship, a huge black sphere with head-sized holes.)

PHOEBE

Wh...what in the world...?

VIZEER VOLSPAR

'Tis time to board the Walbollbing, the swiftest of windships!

PHOEBE

You've got to be kidding? *That's* a windship! It looks like...like the bowling ball my mom keeps in the closet.

VIZEER VOLSPAR

Get thee inside.

PHOEBE

No waaaaay! I mean, how...how do I know it's safe? It's not even insured. I mean, is it equipped with helmets?

MELF and VOLSPAR

Nay!

PHOEBE

And...and what about seat belts?