

## 'Two Strangers' writers, Jim Barne and Kit Buchan, reveal annotated sheet music for the musical's opener

Plus, Jim Barne and Kit Buchan, the duo behind the original musical, share insights about the construction of its story, characters and unique sound.

By Ruthie Fierberg



**KEYBOARD / MD**

*Dougal's ignorance is a delicate matter. On the one hand, he's naïve and barely separates reality from fiction. On the other, he must emerge as an intelligent, albeit eccentric, adult man. (see p. 6!)*

**NEW YORK**  
[Album Version]

Music and Lyrics by **Jim Barne and Kit Buchan**  
Orchestrations by **Lux Pyramid**

**A: ONE-SHOT**

*We set up the song in a confident/carefree way, with a compound time signature and a major key - he knows what he's talking about!*

*Dougal lands on the tonic; self-assured, confident... completely incorrect*

*Dougal lands on the tonic; self-assured, confident... completely incorrect*

802/B20786/25-Bway-rec Two Strangers B'way Cast Album Music Prep by Utsav Bhargava & Chris Guard

Buchan: Dougal's ignorance is a delicate matter. On the one hand, he's naïve and barely separates reality from fiction. On the other, he must emerge as an intelligent, albeit eccentric, adult man. (See p. 6)! Barne: We set up the song in a confident/carefree way, with a compound time signature and a major key — he knows what he's talking about! Barne: Dougal lands on the tonic; self-assured, confident...completely incorrect

ROBIN: "But, you've actually been to New York before?"  
 DOUGAL: "Yes. (grunts) Uh, no. But I have seen Home Alone 2 quite a few times, so..."

B: CLICK "3, 4"

ROBIN: "You serious?"

DOUGAL:  
 There's piz-za for break - fast, There's steam in the air,

ROBIN: "Usuum..."  
 It's 'can-dy' not 'sweets', and the streets are called side - walks. there... My

VS. (C)

During the early workshops, we were often warned that our characters were fundamentally 'unlikeable', Dougal because he's insufferably annoying, Robin because she appears cold or standoffish. Our wager is that, even if they aren't instantaneously familiar, the harder the audience works to care for our characters, the deeper the connection becomes.

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KEYBOARD / MD #2, NEW YORK

17 *rhythmically*

town: where ev-ry-one has an a-part-ment to spare with a sky-line... view... where ev-en im-prob-able

Track / Gtr

dreams come true... Where ev-ry-thing comes with a smile, a hi-five and a side of... cheese;

This is one of the main melodic riffs we use throughout the show. The notes are tightly woven into a repeating pattern that suddenly jumps up a fifth - representing a moment of change for the characters. It is featured most prominently in the last chorus of 'If I Believed'.

ROBIN: "That's our train."  
 ANNOUNCEMENT: "Stand clear of the closing doors, please."

I'm down on my knees. New York.

+ Tri. Tr., Dr. (Cym, colors)

(Gtr. OUT)

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It's worth pointing out that this word doesn't rhyme with "York" in a U.S. accent...

KEYBOARD / MD - 5 - #2. NEW YORK

27

I'm al-rea-dy talk-in' the talk, New York, I'm

Track

w/ Gtr (spreads), Dr (time) (sim. spreads)

Em D<sub>F#1</sub> C G Em D<sub>F#1</sub>

al - rea - dy pop - ping the cork, cause I'm rea - dy... I'm

G C G B C

rea - dy to be in New York, are they rea - dy? Are they rea - dy for me in New

D<sub>F#4</sub> D G/B C D<sub>F#4</sub>

V.S. (RH D's)

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Buchan: It's worth pointing out that this word doesn't rhyme with with "York" in a U.S. accent...

KEYBOARD / MD - 6 - #2. NEW YORK

DOUGAL: "Is that Times Square?"  
ROBIN: "No, that's Queens."  
DOUGAL: "Awesome."

York?

w/ Tri. (Gtr, Bs, Dr OUT) Solo mp

37 J = 123 DOUGAL:  
She's called 'the Big Ap - ple' No - one knows why.

+ Gtr, Perc (2's groove), Dr (time)

Cmaj7 Em7

39 + Bs (sust.)

but she's my kind of town and I'm her kind of street - smart - guy...  
(Sometimes I feel like I'm asking the actor to solve problems of my own making)

Cmaj7 Em7 Bm D Bm7

41 I'll stroll up the Broad-way, I'll or - der a beer,

C Em7

802.02078625-Bway-rec Two Strangers (Bway Cast Album)

Buchan: Some of these lines require immense control and diction from Sam. (Sometimes I feel like I'm asking the actor to solve problems of my own making.) Buchan: An earlier (much earlier) version, before we took seriously the task of transforming Dougal into a credible human being, he sang "I'll climb up Mount Rushmore, to Kennedy's car." Over the course of 7 years, his characters has evolved unrecognisably.

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I'll scream at the sta-tue of Li-ber-ty "Hey La-dy, I'm walk-in' here!" My

home the ci-ty of sto-ries where ev-ry-thing's se-ven-ty sto-ries high,

Track / Gtr.

(Bs, Perc, Dr. OUT)

pp  
C

D

V.S. (Bm)

where ev-ry-one kis-ses their blues good - bye,

The ci-ne-ma ci-ty I've wait-ed the whole of my life to see,

Bs, Shaker (w/ return to TAXI DRIVER, I realized that the stereotypical De Niro impression has departed unrecognisably from his performance in the original film. Nevertheless, Sam is very good at the eyebrows.

"Are you talk-in' to me?" New York,

bring out  
p  
w/ Xylo.

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KEYBOARD / MD - 9 - #2. NEW YORK

I'm al - rea - dy talk - ing the talk, In New - York,

Track

Nylo.

w/ Bs, Gtr (spread) (sim. spreads)

+ Dr. (time)

I'm al - rea - dy pop - ping the cork, cause I'm rea -

dy. I'm rea - dy to be in New York, are they rea -

V.S. (G/B)

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KEYBOARD / MD - 10 - #2. NEW YORK

(directed at ROBIN)

Are you rea - dy for me in New York?

As they do for many young people, Robin's headphones serve as a kind of protective bubble.

ROBIN: (putting headphones on) "I'm just gonna stand over here."

we hear this riff again when Dougal is on the phone to his mum during 'About to go In,' by which point he has worked out what is important to him.

Solo (Band OUT)

DOUGAL:

It's the ci - ty of An - gels, It's the ci - ty of sin.

Again, these lines never really landed until we arrived in America.

Solo

83

84

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Buchan: As they do for many young people, Robin's headphones serve as a kind of protective bubble. Barne: We hear this riff again when Dougal is on the phone to his mum during 'About to go In,' by which point he has worked [out] what is important to him Buchan: Again, these lines never really landed until we arrived in America.

If hardly needs noting that when we wrote this line, it never crossed my mind that it could be controversial or even topical - it's simply part of the common mythology of New York.

KEYBOARD / MD #2. NEW YORK

21

it's a ci - ty of im - mi-grants bud - dy I'll fit right in.

The land of the brave, the home of the free,

bring out

V.S.

Buchan: It hardly needs noting that when we wrote this line, it never crossed my mind that it could be controversial or even topical — it's simply part of the common mythology of New York.

KEYBOARD / MD #2. NEW YORK ("3, 4")

24. -12-

molto rit.

as we land on this word all the music drops away in an unusual moment of vulnerability for Dougal

the li-ber-ty ci - ty where ev-en my fa - ther wants to hang out with me.

mp

Home, there's snow in the ci - ty to - mor - row just see it come twin - kling down, and that's why they all call it

Track / Gtr.

mp

C D Bm

+ Bs. (sust.)

+ Shaker (2's)

D<sub>A</sub> Bm C

Barne: As we land on this word all the music drops away in an unusual moment of vulnerability for Dougal  
Buchan: Ever since day one, we've know we needed snow in this musical.

peo-ple just liv-ing the dream out there, and there's love in the

D Bm

79 ROBIN: (removing headphones) "OK we're about to leave the train and then we're gonna be in New York." DOUGAL: "Yes." ROBIN: "You're not gonna freak out?" DOUGAL: "No." **ff** DOUGAL: New York!

att. Track

C D (no cresc.) Em D<sub>F#2</sub>

(1 bar over)

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Buchan: It is impossible to itemize how many versions of this moment we have experimented with: Sam screams, Sam collapsing, singing in slo-mo, his singing obscured by traffic noise and road works — ultimately the long note was the most triumphant version.

Thanks to our wonderful orchestrator Lux Pyramid, this is one of the most exciting moments in the show — Dougal finally steps off the train into New York City!

Tutti in!

I'm al - rea - dy talk - ing the talk, New, York!

Ab Bbm A<sub>C</sub> D<sub>b</sub> Fm Cm<sub>2</sub> E<sub>b</sub> D<sub>2</sub>(add2) Fm<sub>C</sub>

Track

I'm al - rea - dy pop - ping the cork, 'cos I'm rea -

(Gtr. s's, Perc. / Dr. time) (sim. spreads)

Fm D<sub>b</sub> A<sub>b</sub>

(Bs.) (Bs. sim.)

dy... I'm rea - dy to be in New York, are they rea -

A<sub>b</sub> D<sub>b</sub> E<sub>b</sub>(sus4) E<sub>b</sub>

Barne: Thanks to our wonderful orchestrator, Lux Pyramid, this is one of the most exciting moments in the show — Dougal finally steps off the train into New York City!

dy? Are they rea-dy for me in New York? For two whole

+ Mk. Tree  
ash mp

92 days I'll li-ral-ly be in New York, N - Y -

+ Tamb. 2+4

He makes it look easy, but it's not.

C - J - F - K, F - B - I, C - I - A see I'm al - rea - dy talk - ing the talk, and I'm rea -

Gm F#A E Bb

V.S. (Bb/D)

dy... I'm rea - dy to be in New York, yes I'm rea -

Bb D E F(sus4) D7

Barne: We added this top note after we cast Sam (on account of his wonderful top Bb); Dougal's unbridled optimism is often represented by what is colloquially referred to as the 'Super Mario Cadence.' Three major chords landing on the root note. It is also featured in "Dad" and the "Hangover Duet."

dy? Is it rea-dy for me, Are they rea-dy for me, Are you rea-dy for me? in...New

Gm Eb F(sus4)

(Gtr. slide)

We added this top note after we cast Sam (on account of his wonderful top Bb)

York?

G(sus4) G A(sus2) Ab Bb + G.C.

(CLICK OUT)

Dougal's unbridled optimism is often represented by what is colloquially referred to as the 'Super Mario Cadence'. Three major chords in sequence landing on the root note. It is also featured in 'Dad' and the 'Hangover Duet.'

12  
27

In the early workshops of the original musical “Two Strangers (Carry a Cake Across New York),” creators Jim Barne and Kit Buchan kept hearing that “our characters were fundamentally ‘unlikeable,’” Buchan wrote in his annotations of the sheet music (completed especially for Broadway News) for the show’s first musical number, “New York.” Barne and Buchan kept hearing that their leading man, Dougal, was too annoying and that leading lady, Robin, was too distant. You see: “[Two Strangers](#)” follows a whirlwind 48 hours between Dougal, an overeager Brit who comes to New York City for the first time to attend his estranged father’s wedding, and Robin, a native New Yorker who is the bride’s sister and Dougal’s ride from the airport.

The writing team took the notes about Dougal and Robin and made some changes, embracing the challenge of rewrites. “We liked the characters so much. So when people told us they didn’t like them, we had to try and put ourselves in their shoes and work out why,” said Barne. While they incorporated the feedback, Barne and Buchan chose not to change each character’s core, in hopes of challenging audiences.

“At that time, we had quite lofty ambitions for the show and we wanted it to be and feel different, and that includes [embracing that] people are difficult and they stay difficult,” Buchan said. “That’s something that really good films [demonstrate] — the kinds of films we wanted to emulate or that DNA we wanted to introduce into the show from the films we love. For example, ‘When Harry Met Sally’ or ‘Before Sunrise’ and ‘Before Sunset,’ these are films about difficult people whose difficulties are not going to evaporate.”

It’s easy to root for and invest in likable characters. But what about people who are unlikable — at least, at first? “People, in reality, are difficult to love and it takes effort to love and accept people,” continued Buchan. Likewise, Barne and Buchan offer the type of complexity in “Two Strangers” that requires effort but also yields great reward.

Beyond crafting layered characters for this two-hander, Barne and Buchan also challenge audiences with a plot that gradually unfurls multiple surprises. Buchan, who took lead on writing the musical’s book and lyrics, sprinkled clues that lead up to punchlines and plot twists. “There are various revelations in the plot, and what we learned,” Buchan shared, “is it isn’t actually very satisfying if it just comes like a complete bolt from the blue.” Gratification comes from putting the puzzle pieces together.

And while there are sly discoveries, Barne, Buchan and their director, Tim Jackson, needed to ensure that plot twist never felt too big relative to the intimate story of “Two Strangers.” “It’s a small journey, but a significant one,” said Barne. Buchan added, “We’re zooming in on these infinitesimal behavioral details and alterations of perspective for two people, [and] if we introduce something major, like, I don’t know, one of them gets hit by a bicycle and ends up in hospital, the audience is then magnetized towards that event and might not focus so much on smaller detail.”

“Timmy has played no small part in maintaining that muscularity and the scale, the tone and the scale of the piece,” said Buchan of his director. “He has such an amazing radar for truthfulness.”

That truthfulness is matched in the sound of the score, on which composer Barne took the lead. “New York,” Dougal’s solo when he first lands in the Big Apple, is an unabashedly enthusiastic ode to the city — reflecting his unbridled emotions and excitability. It pairs with Robin’s later song, “This Is the Place,” in which the audience sees New York through her native Brooklynite eyes — an upbeat tune of wistful nostalgia.

At times, the score reflects an “element of twinning,” said Buchan, to dramaturgically and sonically weave together these two people — who seem so different — while also highlighting how they impact each other. Throughout the [full score](#), the melodies ring fresh. There’s even a song set entirely to percussion — an argument in which the tension ratchets rhythmically. (Barne and Buchan had to fight for that one to stay in, as they continued to revise and rewrite over the years.) But the overall pop sound — expressed through hopeful ballads, jazzy ditties and exuberant romps — reflects the souls of these young people who are both searching to find pieces of themselves in order to step into the next phase of their lives.

In the below photos, Barne and Buchan illustrate page by page and measure by measure how they collaborated on lyrics and music, respectively, for the song “New York.” The notations are an example — via a single tune — of how Barne (in black ink) chose musical phrases, specific chords and rhythmic patterns and how Buchan (in red ink) crafted particular lyrics to convey character, establish tone and set the audience up for the musical that is “Two Strangers.”