

Cicada

Jeff Meshel
jmeshel@actcom.co.il

A TV series –the first 4 of 21 episodes.

Episode 1

Flashback: 1970, Jim Statlin and Pete Woods are students at Oberlin College. Crazy Pete, a shouting mean protest singer-songwriter, is organizing an anti-Viet Nam rally. He drafts Jim, who moonlights in a piano bar, to appear. Jim, who majors in getting high and getting laid, figures the demonstration's a good way to meet girls. They sing The Times Are A-Changing, just the two of them, in three-part harmony. They're invited to appear at a major Peace Festival at Ohio State—as a band.

Jim starts teaching Pete bass. They follow a tip to Maharaya A-Tishram (Marty Abrams), living in a cabin without electricity, growing organic vegetables and his hair, meditating. In the cabin, floor to ceiling, are hundreds of bizarre and undefinable guitar-type instruments he's built.

There is no drummer to be found. Rumor says that Garvin Gardner, the math student with a plastic pocket pen protector, plays. Not credible. Till they hear him.

They meet to practice in Maharaya's cabin. Lots of grass. Musical magic.

Kathleen Barry's a tough girl, waiting table at the piano bar to put herself through school. He hears her singing along (condescendingly) with 'Just the Way You Look tonight', and she's not half bad. Jim hits on her by reflex, but she thinks he's shallow, snubs him. Tells her he has an underground band. She's maybe impressed, accepts invitation to rehearsal.

Pete doesn't like Jim bringing Kathleen, says so to her face. But she wants to into the band, and Jim wants into her pants. Maharaya says, 'C'mon, we came to play.' They're improving by leapsandbounds. During break, Pete improvises, 'You came in, holding her hand, the fifth wheel in a four-man band'. Jim embellishes the melody. Pete adds lyrics. It coalesces. She harmonizes. Pete improvises a bridge for her to sing, 'She was looking for part-time gig, who'd have thought it would get that big?'

Campus gigs. Their name spreads. People lying in the grass outside the cabin, getting high, listening to the rehearsals. 15,000 students go crazy at Ohio State. Pete and Kathleen are in a stormy and violent relationship.

Jim gets them into a local studio to make a demo tape, sends it off to companies.

The album is getting play on FM stations, a regional following is growing. The afternoon of their breakthrough gig at a club in Cleveland. They're at the hall doing sound tests, but Pete & Kathleen have fought and she's absent. He's taking his rage out on Jim. Jim goes to fetch her from her hotel room, finds her drunk. She cries on his shoulder, drags him to the floor. Pete finds them. They fight physically, part ways 'forever'.

Flashforward: 2008, Johnny Walker's Cleveland radio show for 1970s Ohio bands. He plays "It's Love", gets several phone calls. Plays it again. It catches fire.

Sheena Frazier, an ambitious young A&R rep for Columbia Records, is called into the office of the CEO, Alex Columbine. He reads her the special front page editorial from Rolling Stone: *This anonymous band not only created one of the most uplifting anthems to idealism of our times; it not only made one of the great regrettably overlooked albums of its time; it charges everyone on the scene today with a profound sadness at the thought of what this band could have accomplished but tragically never did.* He tells her that Columbia has bought a small Cleveland record company just to get the legal rights to this old demo that has become a grassroots hit on fire. Her breakthrough assignment is to find the band, get them to New York to capitalize on the craze before it dissipates. And Yon Sheena is a lean and hungry young lady.

Episode 2

Jim is spread out on a couch in front of a giant TV screen, martini in hand, engrossed in a golf match. White baby grand piano barely fills a corner of the living room. His wife comes in, groomed to Houston suburban perfection, on her way to a charity event at their church. They seem comfortable with each other, if uninspired/unenthusiastic/on automatic pilot. 'Are you coming?' 'Nah, I think I'll sit this one out.' 'You said you'd come.' 'Tell them I had a bad hair day, couldn't leave the house.' 'That's not funny.' 'Oh. Well, have a good time.' She goes, phone rings. 'Shit.' Almost ignores it, drags himself up. 'Hello'. He listens. His face glosses over. Mutes the TV, listening intently. Drinks. 'Hell's bells. I haven't heard that name in a whole long time.' Listens. 'What's it for, some kind of research paper?' Listens. 'Sure, hon, if you want to. Two-thirty is good. Take the shuttle from the airport downtown. Get off at the Bryant Hotel, walk yourself across the street to the Ferguson Building, 23rd floor. O'Brian Wholesale.'

'Mr Statlin!' 'Cmon, Jim. Please, sit.' He watches her cross her legs. She knows that there is what to watch. 'So what's this all about, hon. Cicada? Where'd you come up with that?' 'You really have no idea?' 'Not at all. I haven't heard that name in over 30 years.' She takes Rolling Stone out of her bag, lays it on his very large desk. He reads. 'Holy Jesus.' 'You had no idea?' 'First I've heard of it.' 'The whole "Ajanta" album is getting air play on every FM rock station in the country. "It's Love" is a major hit. Kids from New York to LA are walking around singing 'And love-- Go find love--' It's the biggest thing since they uncovered the lost Hendrix tapes. No promotion, no distribution. Spontaneous combustion. And they're all clamoring to know who they are, Cicada. Jim, you're a legend.' 'I'm a rumor.' 'And—' She hands him a check for \$30,000. 'You're shitting me.' 'That's just the start. When we get the campaign going—' 'What campaign? Promotion. Photos, interviews. TV, magazines. They're standing in line now. *Recording. Touring!* Do you realize the potential here?' 'What about the others?' 'You're the first one I've found.' 'What's in it for me?' 'Are you kidding? Everything!' 'I already have everything. [Pictures flash through his mind: plastic house, numbing business, invisible wife, nagging girlfriend, two fat, stoned, pierced, sullen offspring]. I got a whole life.' 'You have a public. They want you.' 'Nah, you're talking kid stuff. Thanks but no thanks.'

Cut to Sheena and Jim on a plane. He's showing her a Christmas card. 'Sends me one every year. That's all I know. Why didn't you tell him why we're coming?' His Dacron has been changed to designer muslin. Her shoulder is touching his as they confer. 'Didn't

want to scare him off. Not everyone's as malleable as you.' He drives, she navigates. Upscale apartment complex, trees and pool. Lance, a sleek and muscular black guy, answers. 'Garvin, some people for you.' Lance pours tea from a delicate porcelain tea set, Sheena gives the pitch. Garvin, holding Lance's hand, 'What do you think, honey?' 'Oh, go for it, babe. I can get along for a couple of weeks without you.' Garvin smiles sheepishly. 'I guess I'm in.'

Episode 3

Doorstep of a well-worn nondescript Lakewood, New Jersey red-brick home, Jim agape at men on sidewalk in Hassidic garb, children with fringes flying. Twelve year old girl in long sleeves and pigtails, baby sister in her arms, little brother with peyot clutching her long skirt, opens the door and stares at Sheena in formal, very short-skirted business suit, Garvin with purple cravat. Sheena: "Excuse me, we're looking for Marty Abrams?" "Abba!" Marty, in dirty black pants, dirty white shirt, dirty fringes hanging knee-length, stares at them. They stare at his forelocks and skullcap. Jim: "Maharaya?" Marty, with a grin: "Rebbi Maharaya to you." Shmutzadik living room, Sheena struggling with short skirt on low couch, several of the eleven children between her and Garvin, who's charming them with magic tricks. Sheena shpeils. Marty, to Jim: "You're in?" "I don't know what I'm doing here. This young lady apparently caught me in a moment of weakness." Garvin: "Well, it just seems predestined, you know?" R. Marty is hesitant. Sheena hands him a check. "What's this for?" "Royalties from the CD sales. That's with zero distribution and promotion. Columbia's willing to offer you \$150,000 for a one-year contract." "To do what?" "Whatever we can generate. Cut an album, tour, promotions." His eyes widen. Jim, the businessman, for Marty: "Quarter million, excluding standard percentages." Sheena: "200 thou." They look at Marty: "But no gigs on Shabbas, right?" Jim: "We'll call it the Kosher Comeback."

Mrs Barry's home in Minneapolis, her telling Sheena & the boys about Kathleen: hotel management, never married, lots of bad relationships, drowned 9 years ago in a hotel pool. All of them distraught—rudely awakened from a fantasy. Sheena: "We have a check for you, her royalties." "Oh, no, that would go to her daughter, Kaila."

Sign: The Graces—Sapphic Modern Dance Troupe. Sheena, Jim, Garvin, staring through window at 8 women in leotards in dance studio. Marty, back to the window, occasionally peeking. One slight girl barking instructions, her back to them. "When it goes [she sings] 'And they're *faaaaling* all around us' you swoop down like this". They're not getting it, she kicks the tape recorder and storms out of the room. The 4 men stare at the girl. Sheena: "What?" Garvin: "It's a ghost. She's Kathleen incarnate."

Teacher's room, Kaila making coffee, Garvin explaining to Marty that it's a gay troupe. Sheena gives the shpeil, the check. Kaila's bitter, Kathleen was deeply self-involved. "Mentioned it? She never stopped talking about it. Takes me out to celebrate my premiere in New York, big success—and she's telling me about this fucking two-bit college band she sang with." Garvin: "It was a very good band, sweetie." They play her the tape. "I know that. She played it all the time when I was a kid." [Sings. Replica of Kathleen] The guys stare at each other, at Kaila. Sheena gets it, looks at Jim. He nods.

Sheena: "Kaila, how would you like to take a little trip with us?" "Trying to fill her shoes? Forget it." Garvin: "You could do what she never did."

Episode 4

The group holed up in a hotel, each to his own—Marty davening, Gavin ironing, Kaila exercising in leotard, Jim with martini watching her, puts martini on top of upright piano, plays along with the exercise music. Sheena poring over a phone book. "The office says IRS records show he lives in Akron." Gavin: "How dreary." Kaila: "How many Pete Woods can there be in Akron?" Sheena, agonized: "Fourteen."

Sheena holding a crumpled picture, knocking on doors, checking if the answer is Pete. Black woman, Chinese old man, etc. Finally, the desultory photography/stereo department of Walmart's. A man is huffing to pull a pile of headphones out of a low cabinet. Was once a red-head, now little color on less hair. 'Plump' would be a compliment. "Excuse me, Pete?" she asks. He squints up. "What?" uninvitingly. "Are you Pete Woods?" "You need something, lady?" "Are you Pete Woods who was at Oberlin in the late sixties?" A very flabby woman asks for a very flaccid CD. "Nah, wrong guy," he grumbles. She's about to leave. "The Pete Woods who played in a band called Cicada?" He looks at her. "Who formed the band." "I'd like to talk to you about the band." He looks at her over his thick glasses. "I ain't got nothing to say on the subject." Pete squats back down to the headphones. She pulls out a check, shows it to him. He squints back up at her again over his glasses.

Coffee, cafeteria of the Walmart's.

"We're going to use the name."

"You have the right?"

"They're 4/5 of the original band. It's only fair."

"3/5. It was my band."

"That's a value judgment."

"Don't talk to me about values, lady."

"You should let them."

"Fuck them."

"You stand to make a lot in royalties."

"I don't give a fuck."

"We could get it out of you in court."

"Take a year? Two? I'm not sure the Cicada craze is gonna wait for you."

"How much do you want?"

"Don't want nothing."

"So?"

"If you're finished with your coffee, you can go now."

"You're a real schmuck, you know?"

"You have nice legs, you know?"

"What do you have against Garvin and Marty?"

"History, Mama-San."

"And Kaila?"

"Don't know the young lady, honeybunch."

She breathes deeply. "Pete, I don't know the details of what happened. I've heard a lot of versions, and they're all caked with a lot of years of dust."

"Crud."

"But what I do know is that that band made some very exceptional music. Exceptional enough that it cut through all those decades of crud, and changes, and without any promotion, it spoke to people. It grabbed people, and said—"

Pete, cynically: "Just love."

"Yes, just love. Look, Pete, we came a long way to meet you, and we have a lot of hopes riding on this. Would you at least just meet us?"

"Why should I?"

"Because I'm asking you nicely."

"Fuck."

Sheena, Marty, Jim, Gavin and Kaila in the suite. It's been tidy, they're all dressed and waiting. Marty: "Do you think he'll come?" Sheena shrugs. "You know him better than I do."

Pete knocks, jeans, dirty t-shirt. Marty and Gavin embrace him warmly, he reacts with guarded affection. Jim goes up to him, extends his hand. Pete looks at the hand, finally shakes it. Jim (ironically): "Well, you haven't aged a day." Pete looks at him—laughs, they all join in. Sheena: "This is Kaila." Pete stares. To Sheena: "Where's the john?" Hurries off. We see him crying, washes his face, composes himself. They reminisce a bit, stiff. "What have you been doing with yourself?" "Mining diamonds, building an airplane from scratch. Same old shit." "Family?" "Nah. The world's got enough problems without me adding to them."

Sheena, to Pete: "Does Kaila look like her mother?" Pete: "Nah. Not at all." Silence. "I just came to tell you guys that I'm sorry you came all this way. But I'm not interested in going backwards. You can use the name, and I wish you well. But I'm not there. At least you got to see a bit of Akron." Lull.

Marty picks up guitar, plays a gentle version of "It's Love". Jim joins in. Kaila sings.

Pete: "Fuck."

Sheena, glowing, to Pete: "So?" "So what?" "The magic is still there." "Fuck, lady, you're living in a time warp. That's history." She tells him about the rage, invitation from Letterman, the plans for a promotional campaign, recordings, performances. He's not

there. “Just come to New York, hear them out.” Gavin and Marty encourage him, Kaila doesn’t have a voice yet, Jim watches and waits. Pete looks at Jim. Jim: “You’re right.” Pete: “?” Jim: “That’s ancient history. Let’s do something new.” Sheena: “Two weeks?” Pete looks at Kaila. She gestures, “Why not?” Pete assents. Sheena tiptoes into bedroom, dials Alex on cell phone: “I got him!”

Episode 5:

Alex Columbine tries to screw them, Sheena steps up to protect them, threatens to quit. Alex wants to let her go, the group coalesces behind her. Who is Kaila’s father? There are several intriguing possibilities...

It's Love

Think the spirit of Come Together (Youngbloods), choral layers somewhere between Crown of Creation (J. Airplane) and Windy (Association).

The street's on fire, the whole world's going insane
Someone calls me 'brother', but he don't even know my name.
Go find yourself a lady friend
Take her far away, to the land's end
And love-----
Go find love-----
One another, just love-----
All we need is love.

The TV's gone crazy, everybody's messing my mind.
The whole world's upside down, but I ain't done trying.
Leave your troubles, we'll run away
Together we will find a brand-new day
Where there's love---
Go find love-----
One another, just love-----
All we need is love.

We'll go together, hand in hand
Over the rainbow, to another land.

