

The Deacon – first performed 2011

Synopsis

The story opens in a busy inn on the Grassmarket in Edinburgh. The inn is packed with customers, mainly ordinary folk but with a sprinkling of better off gentlemen. As the opening number “Feel the Winter Cold” is sung, the innkeeper, Phineus Miller and his wife, as well as the serving-girl, Ailsa Colquhoun, move among the customers serving food and drink.

Miller and some of his customers discuss ways to forget the bitter cold outside. One of the women suggests the Beggar’s Opera as a good topic since it contains all the ingredients of a good story: a highwayman, a bonnie lass, danger, intrigue, and a narrow escape from death. Ailsa sings one of the airs from the opera, “Over the Hills and Far away”, joined by Lachlan Ogilvie – a man she is clearly attracted to.

Miller announces that it puts him in mind of a real story that has all the same ingredients: “Deacon Brodie”, whom he claims was very fond of the Beggar’s Opera, having been to see it performed more than thirty times. He persuades Lachlan Ogilvie to ‘stand in’ for Brodie while they tell his story. As the story unfolds, more and more customers become involved in the re-enactment. Brodie is revealed as rich and respected, with a taste for gambling. He mixes with the cream of society by day and the dregs by night.

We are introduced to Jinty McNab – mistress of Brodie – and unknowing bankroller of his gambling habit. She discovers his duplicity and ends their affair: “Like Someone Loves You”.

It becomes evident that Lachlan (playacting as Brodie) has his own relationship difficulties with Ailsa. There is something amiss between them.

Brodie, meanwhile, having lost access to Jinty McNab’s money, takes to a little burglary to finance his gambling. As a well-respected cabinet-maker in the town he has access to many fine homes. He makes duplicate keys and returns to pilfer small amounts of money and jewels from many of his clients. Getting a taste for his double life, he seeks out accomplices that can help him increase the size and scale of his operations: Smith, Brown and Ainslie. Although they are initially unsure of the deal offered by Brodie, “Can We Trust Him?” they are persuaded by greed and join him over the next few years in a series of increasingly daring robberies.

We learn that Brodie has taken another mistress: Jean Watt, with whom Brodie has a daughter, Seesil. Although Brodie only lives with Jean for part of the week, it is clear that they love each other and that Seesil dotes on her father, being deeply disappointed when one of their arranged nights is cancelled due to her father’s *business* dealings. It also becomes clear

that Jean is aware that Brodie is seeing someone else. Her main concern is that Seesil is not upset or harmed by this development.

Brodie's gang are very happy with their successes, although it irks Ainslie that Brodie always skims a bit off the top of their takings *because he does all the organising*. Although it is true that they would none of them be half as successful without Brodie, Ainslie constantly challenges their arrangement.

We move to a salon in a grand house. Wealthy socialite, Ewen Farquhar, is hosting a soiree for the celebrated poet Robert Burns. All the guests are excited that it is such a "Grand Affair" with a very distinguished guest list.

At the party Brodie reveals the other woman in his life, as servant newly arrived from the Highlands, Jean Grant: "A Land of Strangers" and Burns meets the woman who is to become his Clarinda, "Ye Banks and Braes". Burns expresses his doubts about the sincerity of some of his admirers, thinking that he is as much the object of their scorn as their admiration; he thinks they find his ploughman's muscles more fascinating and more interesting than his poetry. "Grand Affair: reprise."

Back in the inn, the news of the mysterious, invisible robber who stalks the streets has captured the interest of the town: "Who's this remarkable man?" As we learn of the increasing risks – and dividends – of the gang, Lachlan is visited by Rhona Gunn – his erstwhile lover. She tells Lachlan that what they had is over. She tells him that she knows it is over and is breaking it off before he does: "In Your Eyes".

Brodie's 'arrangement' involving the two women in his life is debated by his gang. Both women concerned have accepted things as they are, each satisfied with what they can have: "Three Nights a Week".

Brodie, meanwhile, is planning a huge job – robbing the Excise Office itself: "Feeling More Alive". The raid is bungled and things begin to unwind.

It becomes clear that one of the problems between Lachlan and Ailsa was that she was not prepared to share Lachlan with another. With Rhona gone, they agree to give their relationship a proper chance: "Promises".

Knowing the game is up, Brodie has fled to London. He continues to mix with those who form the underbelly of society, yearning for continued excitement, having become as addicted to the thrill and danger as he is to cockfights and gambling dens: "Every Day is for Living". He plans to escape to America, via Holland, with a new identity.

Brodie falls ill, however, and while convalescing is spotted and arrested and brought back to Scotland. In goal he ponders, "Where do I Go From Here?" Visited by Jean Watt and

his daughter, we learn that Brodie is confined in a very small cell because he almost succeeded in escaping from the one in which he was initially incarcerated.

Brodie's trial does not go well. He sends a letter to a former lover, now Duchess of Buccleuch, asking for her assistance. She, however, cannot bring herself to help him: "There Were Times".

Brodie is sentenced to hang. The evidence from Ainslie and Smith – who both turned King's Evidence – is irrefutable and after due process the sentence is carried out. "Every Day is for Living – reprise".

Cast

Phineus Miller - Inkeeper –
Isobel Miller - his wife –
Ailsa Colquhoun - serving girl & Jean Grant –
Lachlan Ogilvie / Deacon Brodie –
Duncan Finlay / Robert Burns -
Morna McPherson / Jean Watt –
Andrew McAlister / Henry Erskine –
Agnes / Jinty McNab - Brodie's 1st mistress –
Angus Keith/Ainslie (the thief) –
Donald / George Smith (locksmith) –
Dougal McGregor /John Brown –
Rhona Gunn/Agnes M'lehorse–
Seesil Watt - Brodie's daughter –
Ewan Farquhar - society host/ John Geddes –
John Elliot - elderly doctor -
Grace Dalrymple Elliot - his (much younger) wife -
Duchess of Buccleuch -
Duke of Buccleuch -
Lord Adam Gordon - resident in the Canongate –
Viscount Valentia –

Citizens of Edinburgh

Musical numbers

1	Overture		
2	Feel The Winter Cold	Company	
3	Over The Hills and Far Away	Duet	Ailsa, Lachlan*
4	Deacon Brodie	Company	Solo lines for: Phineus
5	Like Someone Loves You	Duet	Jinty, Brodie
6	Can We Trust Him?	Trio	Ainslie, Brown, Smith
7	Father, Will You Stay?	Solo	Seesil
8	A Grand Affair	Company	
9	Land of Strangers	Solo	Jean Grant
10	Ye Banks and Braes	Duet	Grace Eliot, Robert Burns
11	A Grand Affair – reprise	Company	
12	Entr'acte		
13	Remarkable Man	Company	
14	In Your Eyes	Solo	Rhona Gunn
15	Three Nights a Week	Duet	Jean Grant, Jean Watt
16	Promises	Duet	Ailsa, Lachlan
17	Every Day Is For Living	Solo	Brodie
18	Where Do I Go?	Solo	Brodie
19	There Were Times	Solo	Duchess of Buccleuch
20	What a Day This Will Be	Company	
21	Every Day Is For Living – reprise	Company	

NB: Ailsa and Jean Grant and Lachlan and Brodie are played by the same two actors.

Carpe Diem