

Sojourn! (A Pizza Story)

A musical by Tom and Marty Moran

Setting

The place: Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond,
Concord, Mass., and the Thoreau family home in
downtown Concord, Mass.

The time: Wednesday night, 1845

Characters

HENRY DAVID THOREAU, late 20's.

SOPHIA THOREAU, 20's. HENRY's sister.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, early 40's. Friend of HENRY.

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(A split stage. Stage right, rough-hewn walls suggest a tiny cabin: Henry David Thoreau's fabled abode on Walden Pond. There is a single window, and the only furniture is a writing desk and chair. Stage left, larger walls suggest a more expansive log structure: the Thoreau family home in downtown Concord. The home has a pair of windows, a door, a table and chairs, and a kitchen counter. LIGHTS UP on Thoreau's cabin, where HENRY alternates between writing and pacing pensively.)

HENRY

(writing)

I feel ... flatulent.

(He crosses out word, writes another one.)

HENRY(cont.)

I feel, troubled. My foray into independent living has caused quite a ... stir. It is, perhaps, my monochrome diet. The beans. There are so many. I have been determined to know beans, but I fear that they have come to know me.

(He stands up, looks out window. Returns to journal.)

HENRY(cont.)

It is Wednesday. In Concord proper, my sister will be making pizza. But, these things of the material world are anathema to me.

Emerson was right. I need brook the company of no man. I have all my necessities here on the gentle shores of Walden Pond.

And yet. Pepperoni. Garlic dipping sauce. Anathema. But the thin crust. The crispy crust. No! The trappings of civilization. I came to the woods to live deliberately, not to venture after savory pie. Still, sausage, perhaps, from the chorizo-man. Banana

peppers. I do relish banana peppers. No! These fripperies have no place in my purview! I shall sojourn no more to Sophia's pizza. I have my beans, and these only I need.

(To audience)

Why beans, you ask? A trenchant query!

*Beans edify deliberately
With lessons on simplicity
They fiber up my marrow
And fortify my self-sufficiency*

*Socrates and Aeschylus
Horace and Euripides
Wish they'd gleaned
As much as me
From beans*

It's true!

(He cramps up.)

Oof. Then again...

*Doesn't transcendentalism
Demand diverse pursuits of wisdom?
Am I allowing these legumes
To manacle my sacred mission?*

*It's true they've made it hard to sojourn far
From the compost pot by my cabin door
And the oversoul's gassed up like a balloon
The plaster's quit in patches
I'm profoundly low on matches
And the shot heard round the world fires nightly
In my pantaloons*

*Oh, beans from the start I proffered my heart
But all you ever proffered back was ... trouble*

(He farts, and sighs.)

*Most men lead lives of quiet desperation
Me I'm desperate for deep dish with Canadian bacon
A formidable flurry of artisanal cheese*

On a robust marinara with a tickle of sweetness ...

Aw, screw it!

I'm so so sojourning to town.

I'm so so so so so so so so so so-journing to town!

(To audience)

Don't tell Emerson!

(HENRY rubs his belly and looks across the stage to SOPHIA's cabin. He walks toward it. LIGHT down on HENRY's cabin, up on SOPHIA's. Inside, SOPHIA kneads dough. Next to it are pizza fixings: a block of cheese, some red sauce, toppings. HENRY goes to the window and peers in. SOPHIA notices him.)

SOPHIA

Ugh. Henry again.

(SOPHIA closes the curtains. HENRY goes to the other window. SOPHIA closes the other curtains.)

SOPHIA

Sure I am of what he seeks.

(HENRY knocks at door. She ignores it. Harder knocking. She ignores it. He knocks continuously, and she finally opens the door.)

SOPHIA

Henry. To what do I owe this unexpected bliss?

HENRY

I wanted to show you something. I, um, found this piece of birch bark that resembles James Monroe.

(He produces a piece of bark and hands it to SOPHIA.)

HENRY(cont.)

I wished to share it with you. I know you are a fan of his doctrine. Might I come in and ease my weary legs?

SOPHIA

Actually, Henry, this is not the proper time.

HENRY

But I have ambled all this way merely for the pleasure of your company, beloved sis. Also, is that a ball of dough I spy on yon counter?

SOPHIA

Not tonight, Henry. I have a guest a'coming.

HENRY

Excellent. I will delight in their company. Sometimes the best balm for the soul is-

SOPHIA

I mean, I have a gentleman caller.

HENRY

(blinks)

A date? You have a date?

SOPHIA

I cannot live forever on my own, Henry.

HENRY

I never found the companion that is so companionable as solitude.

SOPHIA

(mumbles)

Which may explain why you're a 28-year-old virgin.

HENRY

Pardon me?

SOPHIA

So there's only enough pizza for two.

HENRY

What makes you think I seek pizza?

SOPHIA

Did you bring your laundry too?

HENRY

Well, of course, but I was just planning to leave it
for mother.

SOPHIA

*Someday Henry you'll drop by
Just to say hi
Not to rub your spartan ways
In my eye, in my eye,
In my eye, in my eye*

(HENRY begins looking around the
cabin, scouring for food.)

*Someday Henry you'll stop by
Just to say hi
Not to pluck your pantaloons from the line
once they're dry, once they're dry,
Once they're dry, once they're dry*

*Oh Henry I know you can't pick your family
But how'd I end up with a freeloading rambler
Who won't pay his taxes
But scours my cabinets for crackers?
A more considerate brother
Mightn't be such a bother
Might have single friends
That are doctors and lawyers
Not philosopher-poets
That spend their hours romancing flowers*

(HENRY locates some food in a
cabinet, digs in.)

*Someday Henry you'll pop by
Just to say hi
Not to plug your mug
With pizza and pie, pizza pie,
Pizza pie, pizza pie*

*Someday Henry you'll drop by
Just to say hi, just to say hi, just to say*

HENRY
So where did you encounter this gentleman?

SOPHIA
On tinder.

HENRY
On what?

SOPHIA
It's a delightful new contrivance. Downtown there's a box full of pencil sketches of eligible men. If you find one attractive, you flip it over and let him know as much in writing.

HENRY
And if you don't find him attractive?

SOPHIA
You use the picture to start a fire. Hence the name.

HENRY
Is this how you fritter away your time?

SOPHIA
Time is but the stream I go a-fishin' in.

HENRY
That's good. May I use that?

SOPHIA
Coin your own clever aphorisms! Now you'd best be on your way, it's a long walk to Walden. Well, actually, it's not, but nonetheless-

(RALPH WALDO EMERSON approaches the exterior door, holding flowers. He knocks.)

SOPHIA(cont.)
-Oh, blazes. I haven't even finished kneading.

HENRY
When you accept all we have been gifted by nature, then you will no longer need.

Comment [MM1]: When I first read this and "a-comin" above, it reads as a bit folksy/lowbrow. But is that the intention? I imagine her to be fairly erudite, as well, just with more limited opportunities. These two words just seemed out of place given that she uses fairly refined Henry-esque language elsewhere.

Comment [TM2]: It's a direct quote from Walden, hence the "can I use that?" So its Sophia being faux-folksy echoing Henry being faux-folksy.

(SOPHIA makes kneading motion with hands.)

SOPHIA
The dough, nature-boy.

(SOPHIA goes to the door and opens it.)

SOPHIA(cont.)
Hello! You must be Elmer.

(RALPH hands her the flowers.
HENRY tries to peer over her shoulder, but can't see around her.)

RALPH
A bunch of blossoms for a bonnie beauty.

SOPHIA
Oh, attractive and alliterative. I knew as soon as I spied your visage there in the public-hall foyer that-

(HENRY finally sees his face.)

HENRY
Emerson! What are you doing here?

(RALPH awkwardly covers his face and disguises voice.)

RALPH
What? My name is Elmer. Elmer (slurs last name)
Howmisnergifen.

HENRY
No, my friend. You are Ralph Waldo Emerson. I would recognize that rakish tie and aquiline nose anywhere.

RALPH
Okay, fine, you have uncovered my ruse. What of it?

HENRY
What of it? You have been married these past 10 years.

SOPHIA
Married?

HENRY
Indeed, happily. Or so I believed.

RALPH
But Henry. My wife, you, me, Sophia - we are all but one soul. One substance. One person. So who's to say anyone is truly committed to any one single individual?

SOPHIA
We are?

HENRY
Are you using transcendental philosophy as a pickup line?

RALPH
Whyever not? We are all just one oversoul, Henry. Climb aboard!

*Who's boarding next on the oversoul express?
All souls aboard!
We got every shape and color every kind of sex
So you won't be bored!*

*Why would you lie with just one wife
When the oversoul express is passing by tonight
And you got a ticket to take you on ride of your life*

The oversoul express doesn't call at monogamy

RALPH AND SOPHIA
All souls aboard!

RALPH
Or any other station that restricts your autonomy

RALPH AND SOPHIA
You won't be bored!

RALPH
*Why would you fret about your marriage vows
The oversoul express is your intended now
So If you're looking to love*

Let transcendentalism show you how

Who's boarding next on the oversoul express?

EVERYONE

All souls aboard!

RALPH

We got every shape and color and every kind of sex

EVERYONE

You won't be bored!

RALPH

*We got miles to go and just one soul
So send out the word on the telegraph pole
There's a party speeding by tonight
If you're ready to roll
Cause the oversoul express is steamed up
And ready to go!*

HENRY

I will admit I never considered it in that light.

SOPHIA

Nor I. What a persuasive ditty!

HENRY

Ralph. If we are indeed really just one big soul,
should we not partner in all our endeavors?

RALPH

That is one interpretation, yes.

HENRY

And you have spoken of this being a date. Why not a
date among the three of us?

SOPHIA

Henry! What debauchery are you suggesting?!

HENRY

I want some of the pizza.

SOPHIA
(gestures to ingredients)
If you would kindly see your way home, you can make
all of the pizza.

HENRY
But wherever shall I prepare it? My cabin lacks in
cookpots, and moreso in cheese. And delightful tomato
sauce. And ripe banana peppers. And-

RALPH
But it does have a bed.

HENRY
Of course, where else should I repose of an evening?

RALPH
Where else, indeed. Sophia, I propose you and I take a
stroll down the causeway toward Walden Pond. It's
quite the secluded spot. Eh, Henry?

HENRY
You would defile my sanctum with copulation?

RALPH
Yes.

SOPHIA
Yes.

RALPH
Need I remind you that I'm your landlord?

HENRY
(gestures towards door)
The swiftest traveler is he that goes afoot. Just stay
out of my beans!

RALPH
Beans? All I've heard from you is pizza chatter!
You're like some solitary thrush seeking to nest in
pizza's bosom.

HENRY
Not so! I am merely researching such urban fripperies
so I can condemn them with prose. Beans alone hold my
heart. After all ...

*Beans edify deliberately
With lessons on simplicity
They sustain my base desires
And agitate my loins sufficiently
It's true I've not rubbed man nor woman
In the fleshy ways of Romans
Pecked man nor woman on the cheek
Like the cheeky-feely Greeks
Not bent on filling up the sheets
Like my mentor up the street*

(gestures to RALPH, who grins and shrugs)

*But I've forged a love affair
A torrid love affair with beans*

(RALPH and SOPHIA exit lustily
towards cabin. HENRY watches them
go.)

A torrid love affair with beans.

(HENRY turns attention to the
dough. He touches it tentatively,
puts the block of cheese atop it,
clearly has no idea what he's
doing. He eventually picks up a
spoon and, sadly, just eats
sauce.)

END OF PLAY