

*The Jasper Musical* is a dramatic tale about love, career ambitions and the ‘just do it’ credo. The story is a loose, contemporary adaptation of Charles Dickens’ unfinished novel, *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood*, told from the perspective of John Jasper, an aspiring young composer trapped between his dream and his job as a répétiteur in a university arts faculty.

Act I begins with a performance by Jasper of his music to an unappreciative audience that leaves him wondering why he should continue as an artist (“*Who’s John Jasper?*”). Days later, during a student rehearsal of Verdi’s opera, *Macbeth*, Jasper takes liberties with the accompaniment and unwittingly impresses the philanthropist, Luke Thunder. Thunder offers to fund the construction of a new theatre if *Macbeth* is turned into a musical. And he wants Jasper to write the music. Jasper, who has no affinity for musicals, is persuaded to accept the offer (“*Give The People What They Want*”) but Sophie Tish, who is assigned to work with Jasper, has reservations. Jasper convinces her that he has what it takes (“*Stepping Stones*”).

Pressure mounts to create a showcase of the musical for Thunder and Jasper works around the clock and takes drugs to fuel his creativity. Meanwhile, Edwin and Rose, the two students cast as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth respectively, find their offstage relationship falling apart, while Jasper unexpectedly starts falling in love with Tish (“*A Proposal*”). Complications arise with Rose’s growing attraction for Jasper (“*Take Me, I’ll Tame You*”), and during a rehearsal she confronts him with her feelings (“*Forbidden Fantasy*”). They are unexpectedly interrupted by Edwin and Rose leaves. Jasper tries to convince Edwin that nothing has happened but, unconvinced, Edwin swipes a stack of books sitting on the rehearsal piano. Forced to pick up the books, Edwin discovers a ziplock bag containing Jasper’s stash of drugs. He takes the bag, threatens Jasper with blackmail, and storms off.

Later that night, Edwin encounters Nandil, an overseas student with whom he has previously brawled publicly—over Rose. They put aside their differences and go to a nightclub. Edwin takes a drug from the stash and gives the rest to Nandil. Nandil soon leaves and moments later Edwin collapses and dies from an overdose (“*Swansong*”). End of Act I.

Act II begins with an examination of the consequences of Edwin’s death (“*Where To Go From Here?*”). Jasper chooses not to reveal his involvement and Nandil, who was previously seen fighting with Edwin, is discovered with the drug stash and suspended from the university. Meanwhile, Sparks, who is the owner of the nightclub Edwin died in, and who happens to be Rose’s mother, deals with a police investigation. She is made aware of the relationship that existed between Rose and Edwin and becomes suspicious.

In a complete change of mood, the following scene shifts to a cabaret venue where Tish performs a song about the need to escape the pressures of life (“*Sometimes*”). She is met unexpectedly backstage by Jasper and this marks a turning point in their relationship. However, Jasper continues to live with his secret.

Not long after, Jasper is confronted with the truth by Sparks who has uncovered his connection with Rose and Edwin’s death and she forces him to resign from the university. While Jasper ponders his future, he receives word that he has been awarded a three-year artistic residency in Berlin. Elated, he shares the news with Tish and presents her with a song (“*Dream Of The Heart*”). However, when he asks Tish to come with him to Berlin, she declines his offer. Shortly thereafter, he learns that Nandil has been charged with Edwin’s murder.

Torn by what to do (“*In Denial*”), Jasper decides to put his career first. He appears briefly at the boarding gate of an airport but then steps into a surreal mini-opera in which elements of *Macbeth*, its planned musical adaptation, and events in the plot up until now, are combined and play out as a contest between love (“*I Am Your Fantasy*”) and professional success (“*Jasper Vs Thunder*”). The mini-opera ends abruptly in a swirl of confusion (“*Melee*”).

Jasper finds himself in yet another surreal scene accompanied by a waltz (“*Dance Of Life*”). Characters from the previous scenes appear, and dance, but none of them recognise Jasper. Tish suddenly appears and without any exchange of words, offers to dance with him. They dance and then, just as suddenly, she recedes offstage. Left alone, Jasper calls the police.