from The Scarlet Professor

Music by Eric Sawyer
Based on the book by Barry Werth

SCENE I


SUMMERFIELD
Come this way, my friends, into my chamber of horrors.
You will not want to gaze, my friends, but you must, my friends, you must.
Your family mailbox has fallen prey to pornographic pestilence.
Yes, merchants of filth, purveyors of slime violate the sanctity of the sealed envelope,
So that obscenity in its extremity may cross the threshold of your homes.
The brown wrapper of the common magazine cloaks the place where lewdness and lasciviousness begin to warp the minds of your beloved children.
So be brave, my friends, this is my chamber of horrors.
Lay your eyes on exhibit one.

(SUMMERFIELD shows them a page from a magazine, which we see in projection. Could be something like this on left.)

CHORUS
Goodness!
We cannot look, we cannot gaze,
We are disgusted and amazed.
To think that our neighbors know such things.
What smut, what filth, the mailman brings!
SUMMERFIELD
You are scandalized, my friends. So am I.
But this is only step one.
Your children, reeled in by smut like this,
proceed to the next level of perversion:

CHORUS
Mercy me!

SUMMERFIELD
Is that what “neither snow nor rain nor heat
nor gloom of night” has come to in this day and age?

CHORUS
This makes us sick, this makes us rage.
We are disgusted and amazed.
To think that our children see such things.
What smut, what filth, the mailman brings!

SUMMERFIELD
Nor snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night
shall stay these couriers from their appointed rounds . . .

CHORUS
To think that our children, our neighbors, can see this smut.
It makes us sick, it makes us sick, it makes us sick . . .

SUMMERFIELD
But save your outrage, my friends, for this

(SUMMERFIELD shows them another page, also seen in projection.
Could be something like this on opposite page.)

CHORUS
We are outraged beyond belief!

SUMMERFIELD
By now, your Johnny’s addiction to depravity is complete.
These are the images he now craves, and his parents cannot compete.
Don’t look away, my friends. Do not look away.
This is the world we live in today.
This is the world we live in today.

(Scrolling through more beefcake images, which are projected.)

And this. And this. And this. And this. And this . . .

CHORUS
No more. Please no more. No more images please. Stop! Stop!

SUMMERFIELD
I run the biggest business in the world
and I will not stand to see it abused
by liberal pawns as subterfuge
in the name of freedom of the press,
dragging our country into this cess;
how many campuses at this moment,
rife with intellectuals and pink professors
are threatened by men of different stripes
than our beloved red, white, and blue?

CHORUS
We stand together against this incursion,
we stand as one to prevent the perversion
of the U.S. Male.

SUMMERFIELD
Pink professors, pink professors.
Brook no bunk from patsy, commie pink professors.

CHORUS
Pink professors, pink professors.
Brook no bunk from patsy, commie pink professors.

SUMMERFIELD
I deplore the prating of these mimsies
and the intolerable tolerance of those Kinseys
who adduce that homosexuality
Harley Erdman

is a state that can be statistically induced,
that psychic masochism is a condition
to which one in three males must simply get used.
Is it no wonder that Soviet minions
seek at this moment to collude
with intellectuals and pink professors
with whom they would communistically commune?

CHORUS
We stand together against this incursion,
we stand as one to prevent the perversion
of the U.S. Male.

SUMMERFIELD
Pink professors, pink professors.
Take no guff from namby pamby pink professors.

CHORUS
Pink professors, pink professors.
Take no guff from namby pamby pink professors.
SUMMERFIELD
And should these namby pink professors
attempt to kink and shrink our youth
with defty lefty airy fairy
scary pages, sick, uncouth —

CHORUS
Let them face the light of truth!

(As the mad dance of the Pink Professors continues, we see REGAN, off to one side, in counterpoint.)

REGAN
I live my life for the state.
I work overtime each day to do what’s right.
Decency. That’s what I believe in.
Deviants in my experience are begging to be caught.
If you arrest one,
you see the look of relief in his face,
and the anguish of a lifetime going away.
I mean to deliver every deviant from that torment.
It has nothing to do with the political circus in Washington, DC.
It’s a matter of decency, plain and simple.
Decency. That’s what I believe in.

SUMMERFELD, CHORUS
Pink professors, pink professors.
Brook no bunk from patsy, commie pink professors.

SUMMERFIELD
Take no guff, brook no bunk.

CHORUS
Should these patsy pink professors
think that they can somehow hide
their kinky, stinky commie finky
pinkness from our nation’s pride —
SUMMERFIELD, CHORUS
The Postal Service is on your side!

(Lights fade on them all.)

SCENE 2

Lights up on a transformed chorus: a group of students and interns being escorted by a woman DOCTOR around the mental ward.

CHORUS
And what do we find on this ward, doctor?
What will you teach us? What can you show?

DOCTOR
I have for you a number of most interesting cases.
Those who suffer torment and shame,
those who strayed across society’s bounds
and felt how indecent they became.

CHORUS
We walk where society hides its secrets,
we walk where society hides its shame.

DOCTOR
(indicating a patient)
Here you see a wife and mother.
You have heard of her perhaps?

CHORUS
What malady afflicts her mind?

DOCTOR
In the barn behind her house
she took many lovers
and then went to raving,
regressing to much like a little girl
when her infidelity was discovered to the world.
CHORUS
Can she be freed from this disease?

DOCTOR
She is almost nearly cured,
straightened out by our latest modern methods.

WOMAN PATIENT
I am almost nearly cured.

DOCTOR
(indicating another patient)
A young man of seventeen.
You have heard of him perhaps.

CHORUS
What malady afflicts his mind?

DOCTOR
Caught touching himself, on a playground swing,
at a bathroom at school, at the back of a train,
a bush in a park, a bus stop in the rain,
and then he went to raving,
falling into a strange depression
when asked to give up his obsession.

CHORUS
Can he be freed from this disease?

DOCTOR
He is almost nearly cured,
straightened out by our latest modern methods.

YOUNG MAN PATIENT
I am almost nearly cured.

DOCTOR
(indicating Arvin)
And now you see our latest guest.
You have heard of him, I’m sure, and news of his arrest.

CHORUS
Is this the famous Newton Arvin?

DOCTOR
A professor at the college for girls, a literary critic known around the world for his eloquence on the books of our dear New England, particularly Nathaniel Hawthorne — and did I mention he once kept company as an intimate friend of Truman Capote?

CHORUS
Now he is branded with shame and scorn.

DOCTOR
But look, he seeks our help. He has recently admitted himself for personality disorder and depression. We have him on suicide watch night and day. One day we will have him cured.

CHORUS
You will free him from this disease, you will free him from this disease. Now he is branded with shame and scorn. You will free him, you will cure him of this disease.

DOCTOR
One day we will have him cured, have him cured, straightened out by our modern methods. One day we will have him cured. The tour now ends, my friends. Good day.
(The Chorus exits.)

DOCTOR
May we talk, Professor Arvin?
I see the pain you’re in. I’m here to help.
Talking is good. It can put one at peace.
You have so much to live for, Professor Arvin.

(ARVIN is uncertain whether to respond. But eventually rebuffs her, turning away.)

DOCTOR
I will leave you to yourself.

(She exits, leaving him alone.)

ARVIN
The Dismal Chamber. So Hawthorne called it!
The lonely room under his mother’s eaves,
where he labored, ten years, alone,
nursing his talent in guilty solitude,
a shadowy island amid the stream of life.
What were his failings? Why, they were legion!
Not to find fellowship with his fellow men,
not to make himself human, a social being,
not to give his personality full voice.
He failed to achieve roundness and roughness as a man.
And his life became a centrifuge, as did his work—
a dramatization of all those forces in our nation
that lead to fragmentation, disunion, isolation, despair.
And so did I, like Hawthorne before me,
build my own Dismal Chamber.
My solitary fortress under lonely eaves—
what a pleasant sanctuary for me!
Finding refuge in imagination,
I read and read, and wrote and wrote,
and if I finally sought a little fellowship . . . ?
Now I turn sixty. My life is over.
My shame has escaped from that dark room.
What can I do but retreat once again
into the darkest corner of my heart,
into the coldest and remotest part
of the Dismal Chamber?
My soul a candle about to flicker out,
but my body bound in public pillory!