

## **My Fair Lady - Character Descriptions**

### **Eliza (age 20 - 35)**

SOPRANO

HIGH NOTE - G5

LOW NOTE - A3

Eliza Doolittle is so much more than a rags to riches Cinderella. She has the ambition of a suffragette and only lacks in society's definition of intelligence because she is a product of her experiences. Eliza believes she is clever and able to achieve beyond her station. She knows her place but she also knows that hard work reaps reward and she is prepared to put the effort in. What she lacks is an understanding of the world beyond her own experiences. So whilst initially keen to put in effort, she cannot imagine the effort that will be required of her. During the play we need to see Eliza's will being beaten down and her confidence crushed. We need to see both rebellion and submission but with the knowledge of an inner flame that keeps burning quietly. This flame is fuelled by the undermining and oppressive attention that she receives, both in the way she is treated and the restrictions that society's expectations impose on her in her new role. The flame is an important key for the actress who needs to recognise it's growing power that leads to Eliza's final outburst at the end of Act 2.

The actress playing Eliza will need the ability to sing the character's vocal range and sustain the appropriate accent through song. Whilst we will not expect a perfect performance in auditions, demonstration of EXCELLENT acting ability is essential. The successful candidate will need to demonstrate the wilful cockney flower girl in voice, gesture and body language as well as presenting the elegance of a princess.

Eliza's first section of dialogue comes from Act 1 scene 1, where she is selling flowers in Covent Garden. Her second extract comes from an argument with Higgins in Act 2. By this point, she has had lessons in elocution and deportment but she has also observed different examples of how to behave - and how not to behave. She knows how to manipulate language and is struggling to deal with a wealth of emotions. The actor needs to show a firm understanding of the text and Eliza's relationship with Higgins.

### **Henry Higgins (age 30 - 60)**

BARITONE

HIGH NOTE - E4

LOW NOTE - B2

Higgins epitomises the British upper class professional bachelor. He is a world famous phonetics expert who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and given a firm understanding of manners - although he lives unto his own laws and choices. Just as Pygmalion violated his 'ivory maid' with his hands, it must be clear that Higgins' abominable behaviour towards Eliza is a violation that is equally undermining. The audience must side with Eliza out of sympathy but warm to Higgins through the play as they see the more delicate influence of the women in his life who support Eliza in softening him. Just like Eliza, we need to see the character's development through the play. So while the actor is aiming to provoke the audience reaction, Higgins himself is focused on projecting his status and ideas onto what he perceives to be the blank canvas and blank minded object in his possession. That is to say, the actor must find Higgins' train of thought and motivation behind his words and actions.

Higgins' first piece of dialogue comes from his encounter with Alfie Doolittle and should demonstrate his simultaneous fascination with the visitor and his ability to manipulate others through his impeccable use of language. The second extract comes from an argument with Eliza in Act 2, where he starts off believing that he has the upper hand but finds Eliza to be getting under his skin when she displays quite how much she has learnt under his 'care'.

### **Colonel Pickering (age 50+)**

BARITONE

HIGH NOTE - D<sub>4</sub>

LOW NOTE - C<sub>3</sub>

A retired British officer with colonial experience; the author of 'Spoken Sanskrit'. Pickering is a collector of things that fascinate him. He likes to tick off experiences and is an easily lead follower. It is this flaw that renders him just as accountable as Higgins for the ill-treatment of Eliza. In putting Higgins on a pedestal, he is swayed into following him without too much thought. However, Pickering is a calmer and impeccably well-mannered gentleman; a trait which supersedes his distraction and ultimately brings him to his senses as he has one thing that Higgins does not: empathy. As with Eliza and Higgins, we must see the character journey wherein Pickering loses himself in the excitement of the project before recollecting himself and supporting Eliza through the ordeal. In casting the Colonel, I will be looking for an actor who can portray the wisdom and ingrained training of the Colonel's past. A mild manner and a warm spirit.

### **Freddy Eynsford-Hill (age 25 to 40)**

TENOR/ HIGH BARITONE

HIGH NOTE - F<sub>4</sub>

LOW NOTE - C<sub>3</sub>

An upper class young man who becomes completely smitten with Eliza. Freddy is a modern and a romantic, unimpeded by society's expectations for himself or the woman he admires. Where Pygmalion 'carv'd in iv'ry such a maid, so fair, as Nature could not with his art compare', he failed to sustain his worship of her in his actions but Freddy is not so ambitious as to want a 'better' version and adores Eliza for what she is. He should be played as accepting and unambitious, grateful for his lot. The sadness is that he is no match for Eliza who has all the ambition he lacks and needs a challenge to compel her to achieve what she sets out for. Freddy needs to show his adoration of Eliza both when in her presence and when talking about her.

### **Mrs Higgins (age 50+)**

Mrs Higgins is a shrewd woman who is not naive to her son's stubborn and selfish ways but quietly delights in the opportunity for him to be on the receiving end of a lesson for once. She knows that she cannot be a successful teacher to him but she is very willing to support Eliza's actions in order to make him see beyond her tongue-in-cheek observation that he has 'lost something' when Eliza is more than what he perceives to be merely a piece of property. The actress needs to deliver lines with a sharp sense of wit for she is the one who makes the most delectable of observations to guide the audience's reactions towards the 'pretty pair of babies playing with their live doll'.

### **Mrs Pearce (age 40+)**

Henry Higgins' housekeeper is impeccably skilled in her work and driven in her mind. Once a mother herself, she recognises the childishness in Higgins' ways but has the patience of a saint and is not averse to speaking her mind when she sees fit to keep him in line. Usually this means ensuring he eats, washes and dresses appropriately when he is distracted by his work but her propriety for manners and appropriate behaviour means that she cannot let his treatment of those beneath him go without comment if they are likely to get hurt. She is a very fair woman and recognises when Eliza sets herself up for a fall but equally steps in when she believes that advantage is being taken.

## **Alfred Doolittle (age 50+)**

BARITONE

HIGH NOTE - E<sub>4</sub>

LOW NOTE - G<sub>3</sub>

Eliza's father; an elderly but vigorous dustman. The actor will need to be characterful and spirited, willing to move and have a good sense of comic timing. Like his daughter, Alfred is an opportunity seeker; unlike his daughter, Alfred is, by his own admission, not the hardest of workers yet quite willing to accept a handout if there's one to be had. Alfred should always have something to say, even if it is not eloquently delivered. The actor should be prepared to learn movement sequences. Cockney accent essential.

## **Harry (BASS/BARITONE) and Jamie (TENOR) (age 20 - 60)**

Harry and Jamie are Alfie Doolittle's sidekicks. They follow him, they carry him, they bow down to him, they mock him, they support him, they get him home and they get him to the church on time. Both actors should be prepared to move/dance in character. Cockney accents are essential.

## **The Servants**

A small team of servants that work under Mrs Pearce in Higgins' household. They appear throughout during the scenes in Higgins' office. They sing the time-lapse, 'Poor Professor Higgins', and have lines in 'I Could Have Danced' and 'You Did It'. These individuals will need to harmonise in a small group but also demonstrate the crisp precision and order of the household in their acting.

## **Ensemble**

In casting the Ensemble, it is important to remember that this is not a song and dance musical but a production that requires beautifully clipped and precise choral singing in the servants scenes and at Ascot, as well as spirit and energy in the working class knees-up for 'I'm Getting Married in the Morning' and 'Little Bit of Luck' and the wistful 'Wouldn't It Be Lovely?' The Ensemble, therefore, need to be versatile.

Likewise, it is imperative that the Ensemble are able to match these singing styles in their acting skills. They each need the ability to display a truthful elegance and refinement of a royal ballroom and contrast this with the rowdy celebration with Alfie Doolittle.

Shaw's play is about status and I will be looking for both principals and ensemble members who can deliver this message through their every appearance. The understanding of a scene and actions set for the Ensemble are as important as for the named characters.

We hope to identify a small group of dancers from within the Ensemble, however the whole cast must be prepared to be involved in movement sequences.

## **Audition Pieces**

*All auditionees will be required to present the Ensemble singing and movement pieces  
AS WELL AS any individual character parts.*

### **Eliza**

1st audition: 'I Could Have Danced' - Middle section cut. Page 2 - 'Two bunches of Violets...' to 'Thank you, sir'.

2nd audition: 'Just You Wait' - Whole song  
Page 93 - 94 'What on earth' to 'No...thank you.'

### **Higgins**

1st audition: 'Why Can't The English' - Whole song  
Page 42 - 'How did you come to know she was here?' to 'You'd better go, Mrs Pearce.'

2nd audition: 'I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face' - From 'Damn' to 'How delightful' - cut to end section and finish off.  
Page 93 - 94 'What on earth' to 'No...thank you.'

### **Freddy**

'On The Street Where You Live' - From 'I have often walked' - cut at 'People stop and stare' and sing end section.  
Page 75-76 - From Mrs Pearce's entrance to her exit, followed by song.

### **Doolittle**

'With a Little Bit of Luck' - up to 'The Lord above'  
Page 42 - 'How did you come to know she was here?' to 'You'd better go, Mrs Pearce.' Page 15 - 'Well Alfie' to 'When did you ever give her anything?'  
Harry and Jamie  
'With a Little Bit of Luck' - harmony lines  
Harry - 'Starlight is reelin'  
Page 15 - 'Well Alfie' to 'When did you ever give her anything?'

### **Pickering**

'You Did It' - stopping just before dialogue "Thank heavens for Zoltan"  
Page 2 - 'Two bunches of Violets...' to 'Thank you, sir'.  
Page 117 - 'Hello, is Brewster Budgin there, please?' to 'Thank you, Boozy.'

### **Servants & Mrs Pearce**

'Quit Professor Higgins' (Mrs Pearce can sing Sop 1, 2, or alto line)  
Mrs Pearce only: Page 75-76 - From Mrs P's entrance to her exit (followed by Freddy's song).

### **Mrs Higgins**

Page 119 - Start to 'behaved like a princess.'

### **Ensemble**

Ascot Gavotte - As far as 'Pulses rushing'  
Last 12 bars of 'Get Me to the Church'  
A short movement section will also be taught at the pre-auditions