The SECRET GARDEN
SYNOPSIS TO THE MUSICAL

Based on the classic novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, a favourite of millions all over the world, The Secret Garden is about the healing power of love and the miracle of rebirth. Through the lyrical shimmer of Lucy Simon’s music ….. the score creates a world where lost loves are found, lost lives are saved, spring comes again, and beauty reigns.

The year is 1906. Young Mary Lennox ............ awakes one morning in India, to discover that her parents, and in fact everyone she knows in the English compound in Bombay, have died of cholera (OPENING). Having nowhere else to go, she is sent to live with her brooding Uncle Archibald, in his 100 room mansion in Yorkshire.

Accompanying the girl from the train station, Mrs Medlock, her uncle’s housekeeper, tells Mary she shouldn’t expect ever to see her uncle, that he is still mourning the death of his beautiful wife, Lily, the sister of Mary’s mother (Rose). Further she tells Mary she will have no one to play with, and she will not be allowed to wander the halls. In short, Mary will find her life here to be as gloomy as miserable as the house itself (THE HOUSE ON THE HILL).

Mary receives this news with stony silence. But she is wilful and determined, qualities which will change not only her life, but that of everyone in the house before she is finished. With the help of the spirits who are watching over her, Mary will upset every one of Mrs Medlock’s expectations.

On her first evening at Misselthwaite, Marty hears an eerie wailing (I HEARD SOMEONE CRYING), but sees only the shadows cast by uncle as he wanders the halls hearing what he thinks is the ghost of his dead wife.

The next morning Mary meets the irrepressible maid, Martha, who hints there might be something interesting to do outside (IF I HAD A FINE WHITE HORSE). Mary is not convinced, but anything seems better than staying in. Proving this point, on her way out she encounters her Uncle Archibald, who seems completely lost, singing and dancing with Lily’s ghost, in an empty ballroom (A GIRL IN THE VALLEY).

Once she begins to spend her days outside, however, Mary’s sourness gradually diminishes. She learns from the cantankerous head gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, (IT’S A MAZE), of a mysterious walled garden which has been kept locked since Lily’s death. And she meets Martha’s brother Dickon, a young forest wizard who calls forth the spring in a rock anthem (WINTER’S ON THE WING). Then, accompanied by the pan pipe and dulcimer, Dickon teaches Mary to speak to the ever-chirping Robin in Yorkshire, and the bird, in turn, shows Mary where to find the key to the garden.

But unable to find the door to Lily’s garden, Mary decides she will plant the seeds Dickon gave her, and goes to her uncle to ask if she might have “A BIT OF EARTH”. That simple request triggers powerful memories for Archibald, and as the “STORM” rages outside, Archibald sinks further into the past. Archibald and his brother, Dr Neville Craven, sing of how Mary reminds them of Lily (LILY’S EYES), and Neville reveals that he was also in love with his brother’s beautiful wife.

Later, still disturbed by the persistent wailing at night, Mary enters the forbidden west wing, where she discovers her cousin Colin, a sickly but imperious boy who is confined to his bed and only visited by his father when he is asleep (ROUND-SHOULDERED MAN). Their budding friendship is interrupted by Dr Craven and Mrs Medlock, and Mary is banished from Colin’s room. At the height of the storm, Mary rushes out of the house, suddenly reliving the cholera epidemic, and feeling more lost than ever. But as ACT 1 ends, the watchful spirits lead her through the nightmare, bringing her finally to the ivy-cloaked door of The Secret Garden.

Act 2 begins as Mary dreams of the perfection the garden promises (THE GIRL I MEAN TO BE). Everyone she has known and loved is alive and well, and all are gathered in the garden to celebrate her birthday.

But the perfection is not to be. Inside the house Dr Craven discovers Archibald packing to leave for Paris, and accuses him of shirking his responsibilities. He insists that Mary is disturbing Colin, and must be sent away to school. The brothers quarrel, triggering the appearance of Lily and Mary’s mother, Rose (QUARTET). But Archibald will not be deterred. He says goodbye to the sleeping Colin (RACE YOU TO THE TOP OF THE MORNING) and leaves.
On the next clear morning, Mary tells Dickon that she has found the garden, but it is dead. It is the most “forgotten place” she has ever seen. Dickon sings the melodic “WICK”, the Yorkshire word for “alive”, and encourages her to take a closer look. Together they resolve they will bring the garden back to life.

And not long after that, Mary tells Colin she has found his mother’s garden, and wants him to see it. When he confesses he is afraid to go outside, Lily’s spirit comes to help him (COME TO MY GARDEN/LIFT ME UP). Colin and Mary visit the garden together for the first time at night, and through its magical power, her faith in him, and a Hindu chant she learnt from her Fakir and her Ayah in India, Colin overcomes his fear and stands (COME SPIRIT, COME CHARM).

Then, passionately needing to remain at Misselthwaite to see the garden bloom and Colin regain his strength, Mary refuses to go to the boarding school Dr Craven has found for her. Martha encourages her to “HOLD ON”, and helps Mary with a letter to her uncle in Paris, asking him to come home (LETTER SONG).

Mary’s letter finds Archibald in a very dark moment (WHERE IN THE WORLD). But the ghost of Lily appears to comfort him, to ask his forgiveness (HOW COULD I EVER KNOW), and lead him back home. There amid the starting blooms and splendid fragrances of the no longer secret garden, Colin walks into his father’s arms and proclaims that he is well.

In the final scene, Uncle Archibald welcomes Mary as his own child, and assures her that Misselthwaite Manor is her home now. And then, to thank her for restoring their health and happiness, he gives her the beautiful garden for he own. Then as the living family comes together, the ghosts, no longer needed, depart one by one (FINALE).

- Marsha Norman