

LIBRETTO

# MOOCH THE MESSY

An Opera for Children

Based on the book by  
Marjorie Weinman Sharmat

Music by Marcus DeLoach  
Libretto by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat and Marcus DeLoach

First Performance:  
September 9, 2010  
Arts Center at the Federal Building, Greenwood, SC

Commissioned by:  
Greenwood Music Festival

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the Greenwood Music Festival, the Greenwood County Library,  
and the Friends of the Greenwood County Library.

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### First Production

Music Director: **Lynn Baker**  
 Stage Director: **Marcus DeLoach**  
 Set, Costume, and Lighting Design: **Keith Jameson**  
 (Based on the original illustrations by Ben Shecter.)

Mooch: **Keith Jameson**  
 Father: **Marcus DeLoach**  
 Mail-Rat: **Annalee Lethco**

### Cast of Characters (in order of vocal appearance)

**Mooch** (medium-high voice), a messy rat  
**Mail-Rat** (medium voice/actor), the postman  
**Father** (medium-low voice), Mooch's father

### Synopsis

**A rat's hole in Boston, Massachusetts, (1976)** – “There is nothing better than to be a rat and live in a hole under a hill in Boston, Massachusetts,” says Mooch, as he fixes himself a cup of hot cocoa. A minute later the Mail-Rat delivers a letter from Mooch's father, saying that he is coming for a visit. Mooch is very excited at the thought of seeing his father and showing him his place. However, when Father arrives, he is surprised and bothered by how messy Mooch's home is. Mooch shows Father all around his various and favorite tunnels, which are filled with cheese and places to rest. But Father cannot rest after he trips on an old shoe Mooch left out. Mooch puts the shoe away and also cleans off his rumbled up bedspread. Father is pleased and the two go out for a picnic in the park. But Father doesn't enjoy himself at the picnic because Mooch's ants come along and crawl all over him. Later, back at Mooch's place, Father sneezes because of Mooch's dust and accidentally sits on an uncomfortable zipper. Desperate, Father says, “I think I'll go back to bed for about a year,” and crawls into bed. That night, in hopes of making his dad's visit better, Mooch secretly cleans up his entire hole. When Father wakes, he's so surprised at the sight, he assumes that Mooch has been robbed. Mooch calms him down by explaining what he did during the night and Father is very pleased. He tells Mooch how proud he is of him and, before leaving, reveals a new tunnel he has secretly dug for Mooch as a present. Father then leaves and Mooch is alone again in his newly-cleaned apartment. However, he cannot stand the neatness, for he is not happy unless he can see all of his possessions around him. Mooch begins unpacking everything that he put away, including the dust, and strews his belongings all over in order to make things the way they were before Father's visit. Lastly, he fixes himself another cup of cocoa and gets into bed to watch the late show on T.V.

In this story Mooch learns about neatness, love, and responsibility. He also learns to be himself.

The approximate running time is 30 minutes.

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### **OVERTURE**

*A rat's hole in Boston, Massachusetts, (1976) – The curtain rises to reveal MOOCH fixing himself a cup of cocoa. The apartment, which is situated among exposed and rusty sewer pipes is an utter and complete mess. Clothes peek out from drawers, hang on lampshades and dangle from the edges of crooked picture frames. Candy wrappers and half-eaten boxes of cookies are left out, and his unmade bed looks like a garbage scow of used plates of food, pencils and trash. Numerous items are strewn randomly about on the floor and on the chairs, leaving no place to sit. There is a dusty-paned window to the right of a door (center-stage) that has a sign over it which reads, "HOME SWEET HOME."*

**MOOCH:** There is nothing better than to be a rat,  
and live in a hole under a hill in Boston, Massachusetts.  
With a piece of cheese, and a little drink,  
and my own things around me.  
What a fine hole to come home to!

*[He sits with his drink and opens a newspaper.]*

There is nothing better... da-da, dum-di... *[He hears something.]*  
Oh! The Underground Mail Delivery!

*[After listening through the door to several scurrying noises, MOOCH opens it to find the MAIL-RAT standing there with a satchel that reads "UNDERGROUND MAIL DELIVERY." He hands a letter to MOOCH.]*

**MAIL-RAT:** Letter! Letter for Mooch.

**MOOCH:** That's me! *[Taking it.]*

**MAIL-RAT:** There you are. Good day! *[Tipping his cap.]*

*[He leaves.]*

**MOOCH:** It's from Father. [*Opening and reading the letter.*]

[*MOOCH continues to mope along with the words while FATHER sings, slightly ominously, from off-stage.*]

**FATHER:** Dear Son Mooch,  
I am coming to visit you in four days.  
I look forward to seeing you and your hole.

**MOOCH:** Love, Father  
[*Jumping.*] Hooray! Hooray!  
I can hardly wait for father to see me and my hole.

[*Heading for his dresser, MOOCH retrieves four mismatched socks.*]

I'll put one stocking on a bedpost for each day that passes,  
and when all the posts have stockings, then father will be here.

[*MOOCH goes to bed and sleeps (snoring) but gets up each day until all four socks have placed on the bedposts. He then awakes to three knocks at the door and, excited, opens it to find that FATHER has arrived.*]

Hello.

**FATHER:** [*Warmly.*] Hello.

**BOTH:** Hello!

[*They hug and kiss each other.*]

**MOOCH:** Come into my hole.

[*FATHER sees clothing hanging on doorknobs, lamps, and picture frames as well as four socks on the bedposts.*]

**FATHER:** [*Shocked.*] Mooch!  
You keep a very sloppy hole.

**MOOCH:** [*Innocently.*] I like to see all my things.  
Come, I have lots to show you.

[*They run out the door and into the tunnels. MOOCH is in the lead and FATHER does his best to keep up.*]

Here is my favorite tunnel. [*MOOCH scratches and scrunches.*]

Scratch those walls. Scrunch that mud. [*He does it again.*]

**FATHER:** I'm scratching, I'm scrunching. [*Following suit.*]  
Scratch those walls. Scrunch that mud.

**MOOCH:** Run and run! [*Running ahead.*]

**BOTH:** Run and run!

[*They arrive at an open chamber filled with large wheels of cheese.*]

**FATHER:** [*Amazed.*] Cheese!

**MOOCH:** [*Proudly.*] Cheese!

**BOTH:** Cheese!

**MOOCH:** This is my cheese tunnel. Sniff!

**FATHER:** I'm sniffing! [*FATHER bends down to sniff the cheese.*]  
[*Impressed.*] Mmm!

**MOOCH:** I'm so happy you are here, to run with and sniff with and be with.

[*Again they enter the tunnels running.*]

**BOTH:** Scratch those walls. Scrunch that mud. Run and run! Etc...  
[*Scratching and scrunching as before.*]

[*MOOCH leads FATHER into another hollow.*]

**MOOCH:** Here is my lying-down place.  
Lie down, Father. Stretch. Rest. [*MOOCH lies down on the ground.*]

**FATHER:** I will do all three. [*FATHER stretches.*]  
Boston is such a fine city to live under. [*Taking off his suit jacket.*]

**MOOCH:** Yes, [*Jokingly.*] there is so much to scratch and scrunch.

[*FATHER goes to lie down as well but, in the process of doing so, trips over an old shoe that has been left out by MOOCH.*]

**FATHER:** [*Annoyed.*] And trip over.  
Let's go home.

*[FATHER is not amused and the two quickly head back to MOOCH's hole.]*

*[Back in the hole, FATHER sniffs around suspiciously as if there is a curious or foul aroma in the air.]*

Maybe you could pick up one coat,  
or one shoe or one shirt?

**MOOCH:** *[Contemplating.]* Maybe one thing... choose.

**FATHER:** *[Sharply.]* I choose a shoe—the one in the middle of the doorway.

*[MOOCH guiltily picks up the shoe and goes to place it on the table.]*

*[Stopping him.]* May I also choose where the shoe goes?

**MOOCH:** *[Hesitatingly.]* Yes.

**FATHER:** I choose the closet! *[With a harrumph.]*

**MOOCH:** *[Aiming to please.]* I'll take away two shoes.  
That will make you happier.

**FATHER:** *[Pleased.]* Good boy. Good rat.  
I'll see you in the morning. *[FATHER goes to bed.]*

**MOOCH:** *[Pensively.]* I want to make Father's visit perfect.  
I could start with my bed.

*[MOOCH gets up onto the bed, lifts the spread, and shakes off all of the garbage and crumbs.]*

There, there.  
When Father wakes up he will see that I am a neat sleeper.

*[Tucking himself in "smoothly and neatly."]*

*[Repulsed.]* How smooth it feels, how neat.  
*[Bursting out.]* How horrible!  
*[He catches himself being too loud and goes to sleep (without snoring).]*

*[Lights down.]*

*[Lights up. An alarm goes off and FATHER stops it.]*

**FATHER:** *[He yawns and stretches. Then, shocked]*

*at seeing MOOCH's clean bed.] Mooch!*  
Your bed has lost its bumps! How wonderful!  
What will be next?

**MOOCH:** *[Standing up on the bed.]* All of today will be great!

**FATHER:** All of today will be great!

*[MOOCH grabs a sack of food and the two run out the door. They sing a happy song while scurrying through tunnels.]*

**MOOCH:** I packed a sack. A sack I packed.

**FATHER:** What did you pack inside the sack?

**MOOCH:** A breakfast for the field.

**FATHER:** A breakfast sack!

**MOOCH:** That's what I packed.

**FATHER:** But what is there inside the sack?

**MOOCH:** I packed some milk and oatmeal.  
Cheese and snails and sour cream, oh, they are so perfect!  
And jam sandwiches, your favorite.

**FATHER:** Cheese and snails and sour cream, how perfect!  
And jam sandwiches, you know they are my favorite.

**MOOCH:** I packed a sack. A sack I packed.  
I packed a breakfast for the field with my father.  
With snails and sour cream. Jam sandwiches!

**FATHER:** You packed a sack! A sack you packed.  
Jam sandwiches! Jam sandwiches for the field!  
My Mooch packed us a breakfast!  
Jam sandwiches!

**BOTH:** Jam sandwiches for breakfast. What a perfect breakfast!

*[They arrive at a shaded picnic spot (outside) where they sit down on the grass and open up the lunch, admiring the selection of food.]*

**FATHER:** Mmm.

**MOOCH:** Mmm.

**FATHER:** I'd like a jam sandwich, please. [*MOOCH gives him one.*]

**MOOCH:** Please pass the snails. [*FATHER passes them.*] Thank you.

**FATHER:** You're welcome.

*[They sit and munch happily (and audibly, with "Yums") but FATHER has a growing feeling that they are being watched. MOOCH, oblivious, keeps munching when FATHER suddenly jumps up, horrified.]*

Ugh! Ants! [*Furiously shaking them from his jam sandwich.*]

**MOOCH:** [*Calmly and proudly.*] I leave my jam jars open.  
The ants they eat and play.  
And they get sticky and happy.

*[An ant crawls up FATHER's leg and torso, and across the bridge of his nose.]*

**FATHER:** Ugh! My nose! My clothes! [*Stamping his feet and shaking his arms.*]

**MOOCH:** [*A bit taken aback.*] You don't like my picnic?

**FATHER:** [*Decidedly, while packing up the lunch.*] No!

*[The ants recede and Father's gaze follows them out, in order to be sure that they are gone. The two pack up their lunch and quickly set off for home.]*

**MOOCH:** [*Somewhat exasperated, now trying to keep up with FATHER.*]  
I will put covers on all my jars of jam.

*[FATHER opens the door to the hole, enters, and quickly and neatly puts the lunch away in the cabinets. He then collapses on a chair, not noticing that Mooch has left a jacket there.]*

**FATHER:** [*Exploding.*] Yikes! A zipper.

**MOOCH:** [*Shyly.*] Sorry. I will put it in the drawer.

*[MOOCH picks up the jacket and puts it away while FATHER tentatively sits back down in the chair.]*

*[Dreamily.]* When it was on the chair  
I only had to remember to wear it when I was cold.

Life was easy. [*MOOCH slumps, sitting down on the bed.*]

[*FATHER bursts out sneezing several times.*]

**MOOCH:** Do you have a cold?

**FATHER:** No... no... Dust makes me...

[*Trying to hold back, he loses control and sneezes again.*]

... sneeze.

**MOOCH:** [*Lovingly.*] Dust is nice to write words in.

[*MOOCH writes his name on the dusty windowpane with his finger.*]

**FATHER:** [*FATHER groans miserably.*]  
[*Giving up.*] I think I'll go back to bed for about a year.

**MOOCH:** [*Concerned.*] A year?

**FATHER:** Yes.

[*Desolate, FATHER goes to bed and pulls the covers over his head.*]

**MOOCH:** [*Thinking.*] Dust makes Father sneeze, so I will get rid of my dust.

[*MOOCH takes a hanky from his pocket and slowly wipes his name and the dust off of the windowpane.*]

Goodbye dust messages.

[*Finishing, he absentmindedly folds the cloth and starts to put it in his pocket. At that moment, MOOCH gets an idea.*]

And Father will feel much better if I clean everything.

[*Excited, MOOCH cleans the entire hole, making it spotless. He seems to enjoy the cleaning, and dances and juggles his clothing while putting it away. FATHER sleeps through all of the commotion (He is a heavy sleeper.). Having finished cleaning, MOOCH proudly comes downstage center.*]

It looks so different now that it's clean,  
and Father will be so surprised when he sees.  
"Mooch has a clean hole!" is what he will say.  
And we will scratch and scrunch and run all the day!

*[MOOCH turns upstage proudly taking in his masterpiece. After a moment he sits down on the floor (still facing upstage) trying to keep up his enthusiasm for being neat.]*

When Father wakes up he will shout, "Neat, neat, hooray!"

*[Acidly.]* This place looks too neat.

I am so mad I'd like to tear all my hair out!

*[He tousles his hair furiously with both hands.]*

But where will I put it if I do? *[Resigned, MOOCH crawls into bed.]*

*[Lights down.]*

*[Lights up as FATHER turns off the alarm. He stretches and yawns.]*

**FATHER:** *[Shocked.]* Mooch! *[Running to MOOCH's bedside.]*

*[Shaking him awake.]* Mooch!

*[Twittering in a tizzy.]* Wake up, Mooch!  
Wake up, son! You have been robbed!  
Somebody has stolen everything!  
Your shoes and your sheets!  
Your towels and belts, your sweaters and shirts!  
Pillows, neckties, and your candles,  
My son, you have been robbed! *[Shaking his head in disbelief, and pressing his palm to his forehead.]* They even took your dust messages!

**MOOCH:** *[Sweetly, while still waking.]* No, Father, I did it.  
*[With somewhat less confidence than before.]*  
I wanted you to shout, "Neat, neat, hooray!"

**FATHER:** *[Shocked and delighted.]* Mooch!  
*[Proudly.]* It is a neat hole.  
Good boy. Good rat. *[Patting MOOCH on the head.]*  
Now I really feel at home here.  
Let's have a good breakfast, and then run and run, *[Pretending to run.]*  
and scratch and scrunch. *[He scratches and scrunches.]*  
I'm having a perfect time.  
I don't trip. I don't sneeze.  
I don't sit on zippers.  
Now it's time for me to go.  
But first, I have a goodbye present for you. Look!

*[FATHER draws back a curtain on the wall, revealing a new tunnel.]*

**MOOCH:** *[Full of Wonder.]* Oh! A new tunnel!

**FATHER:** I dug it while you were sleeping.

**MOOCH:** *[Ready to dig in.]* Oh, it's dark and it's muddy and terrific!

*[FATHER puts on his jacket and picks up his hat and suitcase.]*

**FATHER:** I will remember our visit.  
I'm proud of a son who has his own hole.  
And I will remember it just the way it looks now.

**MOOCH:** I'm glad.

**FATHER:** I love my Mooch!

**MOOCH:** I love you Father!

*[They hug.]*

**FATHER:** Goodbye! *[Putting on his hat.]*

**MOOCH:** Goodbye!

**BOTH:** Goodbye!

*[They wave goodbye and FATHER exits. MOOCH shuts the door behind him and looks around, trying not to burst.]*

**MOOCH:** Neat! *[He sees the neat bed.]*

Neat! *[He sees the clean table.]*

I hate neat!

*[MOOCH launches into making a giant mess. He empties his drawers, closets, tunnels, etc., throwing his belongings EVERYWHERE.]*

Hello, shoe. Hello, other shoe. *[He snuggles the shoe and then chucks it.]*

I've missed you!

Hello, belts. Hello, shirts.

Welcome home, socks! *[There is an explosion of colorful socks.]*

Sweaters, jerseys, towels, blankets, sheets!

*[He unfurls a sheet like a battle-flag.]*

Sandals, t-shirts, shorts and denim jeans, I welcome you!

*[Whipping items out of his dresser.]*

Hello, tie! Hello, pants! Hello, hat!  
I see you! I see you!

*[He stirs up a cloud of dust up from the floor and into the air.]*

Whee, dust! Whee, dust! Whee! *[Watching the dust gently fall all over.]*  
*[Self-satisfied.]* There! There!

*[He checks the table with his finger to be sure that it has a good coating of dust, which it does.]*

That's the way it was before Father came.  
Now I'll make a cup of cocoa, I think.

*[MOOCH fixes himself a cup of hot cocoa and grabs the remnants of a candy bar. He comes downstage center.]*

There is nothing better, than to be a rat,  
and live in a hole under a hill in Boston, Massachusetts.

*[MOOCH starts for his bed, taking his mug with him, but leaving the empty candy wrapper on the table. He gets into bed and turns on the late show.]*

*[Blackout.]*



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