

SEVEN GUITARS

Synopsis

Seven Guitars brings a post-war Pittsburgh and us into the world of the 1940s. We sort through the plight of the Black American men who fought and died in World War II, who now return home to find they must confront the same inequities they'd faced before they left. Blues singer Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton returns from a 90-day stretch in the county jail with a recording contract in his pocket and a plan to take his woman and his band to Chicago. Buoyed by the heroics of the great black boxer Joe Louis, Floyd is sure the world is finally ripe for black heroes. But the backyard that serves as his office, social club and romantic getaway seems haunted; and his eccentric neighbor, Hedley, who teeters between wisdom and madness, is destined to bring Floyd's dreams of success to an end.

Characters

CANEWELL: He and Red Carter are Floyd's closest friends. He's an edgy, quick-tempered harmonica player, who's tired of playing back-up in life for Floyd. He made the trip with Floyd to Chicago the first time and regrets it. He loves Vera.

FLOYD: Blues singer Floyd "Schoolboy" returns to Pittsburgh at thirty-five years old with a hit song and an opportunity to record a record back in Chicago. In the time since he recorded the initial song, Floyd has squandered the flat fee he received for recording, left his girlfriend (Vera) for another woman, was then left by the other woman, pawned his guitar, and spent ninety days in jail after being arrested while walking home from his mother's funeral. After a year of trials and tribulations, Floyd wants to return to Chicago with Vera, his guitar, and a new sense of self. He is ready to "live with" not "live without" Unfortunately, the lengths he's willing to go to, to make his dreams happen, become his undoing.

RED CARTER: He and Canewell are Floyd's closest friends. He's a drummer by profession, an expansive, laid-back fellow who can identify a rooster's birthplace by the sound of his crow.

RUBY: Louise's niece who comes to Pittsburgh from Alabama. Two men in Alabama were ready to kill for her. She is a free spirit and is looking for a man to be the father of the child she is carrying.

VERA: Floyds's ex-girlfriend and eight years his junior. She loves Floyd, but after he left her for another woman she is slow to trust him again. She may have had a relationship with Canewell in Floyd's absence. She is good friends with Louise.

LOUISE: Is a hearty, buxom woman who, years earlier, allowed her man to walk out peacefully in exchange for his pistol. Louise describes herself as, "forty-eight going on sixty." Although she claims to have no interest in love, she has an attachment to Hedley.

HEDLEY: an old man, not altogether right in the head, who has turned his back on the white world he loathes. He's a believer in saints, spirits, prophets and the ghost of Charles (Buddy) Bolden, the legendary New Orleans trumpeter who died in an insane asylum. More than anything else, Hedley would like to sire a messiah.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-01

Time: 1:50

Type 1: Comedic

Type 2: Farm Animals

Act 1; Scene 5

CANEWELL

That's one of them Alabama roosters. See, he fall in love with the way he sound and want to crow about everything. Every time the notion strike him. That don't do nothing but get people confused. That kind of rooster ain't no good for nobody. Best thing you can do is try and make a stew out of him. If you wanna take the time to fuss with it. Then you got your Georgia rooster. It don't know it's a rooster. It thinks it's a dog. It crow every time somebody come around. It don't do nothing but make the bulldog mad 'cause it's trying to put him out of a job. Then you got your Mississippi rooster. He sit up on the roost and roost. The sun even act like it wanna come up, he be right there with it. The sun come up at five, he crow at five-oh-one. Seem like he say, "Let me do this and get it over with so I can get back to roosting." He take his job real serious, but he don't want to be working all day. He say, "I crow once in the morning and twice on Sunday. Let you know when it's time to go to church." That's the only time he crow other than if somebody disturb the hens in the barnyard. That's the way your Mississippi rooster is.

I'll tell you another thing about the rooster. The rooster didn't crow during slavery. He say, "Naw. I ain't gonna be part of nothing like that. I ain't gonna wake nobody up." He didn't start crowing again till after the Emancipation Proclamation. The people got to whooping and hollering so, he say, "Naw, you all ain't gonna leave me out." That's why he crow so loud. If you think I'm lying, go and find you somebody from back in slavery time and ask them if they ever heard a rooster crow.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-02
Time: 1:30
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Love
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 7

CANEWELL

I always did believe in love. I felt like if you don't believe in love you may as well not believe in nothing. Even love that ain't but halfway is still love. And that don't make it no less 'cause it's only coming one way. If it was two ways it still be the same amount of love. Just like say I loved you and you didn't love me back. I can still say I'm filled up with love for Vera. I go walking down the street people can see that. They don't know what to call it but they can see something going on. Maybe they see a man who look like he satisfied with life and that make him walk more better. Make him walk like he got a million dollars in his pocket. If I loved you and this time you loved me back . . . I don't see where my love for you can get more bigger than it already was. Unless I walk like I got two million dollars. Sometime people don't count it if you ain't loved back. But I count it all the same.

Some women make their bed up so high don't nobody know how to get to it. I know you ain't like that. You know how to make your bed up high and turn your lamp down low. That's why Floyd don't want to lose you. I think you and Floyd ought to go ahead and see what you all can make of it.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-03
Time: 1:30
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Love
Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 2

FLOYD

I had just got out the army. They give me forty-seven dollars. Adjustment allowance or something like that. I come on up Logan Street and I seen you. That's why I always say I had a pocketful of money when I met you. I seen you and said, "There go a woman." Whatever else you might say - a pretty woman, a nice woman, a not-so-nice woman - whatever else you might say, you got to put that "woman" part in there. I say, "Floyd, there go a woman." My hands got to itching and seem like I didn't know what to do with them. I put them in my pocket and felt them forty-seven dollars . . . that thirty-eight under my coat . . . and I got up my nerve to say something to you. You remember that? Seem like that was a long time ago.

I knew you was just getting started. But what you don't know, I was just getting started too. I was ready. You was just what I was looking for.

I said, "That's the kind of woman a man kill somebody over." Then I see you turn and walk toward the door. I said, "They just gonna have to kill me." That's when I went after you. I said you was just right for me and if I could get that I never would want nothing else. That's why you ought to try me one more time. If you try me one more time, you never carry no regrets.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-04

Time: 1:30

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Value of Life

Type 3: Music

Act 2; Scene 3

FLOYD

(Quietly): I had seven ways to go. They cut that down to six. I say, "Let me try one of them six." They cut it down to five. Every time I push . . . they pull. They cut it down to four. I say, "What's the matter? Everything can't go wrong all the time." They cut it down to three. I say, "Three is better than two-- I really don't need but one." They cut it down to two. See . . . I am going to Chicago. If I have to buy me a graveyard and kill everybody I see. I am going to Chicago. I don't want to live my life without. Everybody I know live without. I don't want to do that. I want to live with. I don't know what you all think of yourself, but I think I'm supposed to have. Whatever it is. Have something. Have anything. My mama lived and died she ain't had nothing. If it ain't nothing but peace of mind, then let me have that. My mama ain't had two dimes to rub together. And ain't had but one stick. She got to do without the fire. Some kind of warmth in her life. I don't want to live in a cold house. It a cold world, let me have a little shelter from it. That's all I want. Floyd Barton is gonna make his record. Floyd Barton is going to Chicago.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-05

Time: 1:50

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Gambling

Type 3: Marriage Proposal

Act 2; Scene 6

FLOYD

You know better than to ask me where I get anything from. I took a chance. Lots of times in life you taking a chance. Some people say that's all life is. Say, "I'm gonna take a chance on this . . . and I'm gonna take a chance on that . . . and I'm gonna take a chance on the other." And then sometime you be taking your last chance. If you taking your last chance then you done used up your life. I say I'm just getting started and I didn't want to take no chance of not getting back up to Chicago. So yeah, I took a chance. I went out there to pay the gravestone man the rest of the money. He had the gravestone already made up. It's gray marble. It say "Maude Avery Barton." Got two roses. One on each side. It looked so pretty. He say he have it on the grave by Mother's Day. We gonna go out there and see it. I left out of there and went down to the Greyhound bus station. Look here . . . (*Pulls some tickets out of his pocket*) What that say? "Pittsburg to Chicago." I told the man to write your name on it . . . he said they didn't do that. I took a pencil and wrote it on there myself. (*Shows her the ticket*) Then I made a long-distance phone call . . . cost me three dollars and ten cents. I called Mr. Wilbert H. Gardner, president of Savoy Records, and told him I would be there on the tenth of June. Then I called the Delaware Towers Hotel on State Street and told them to get ready their best room for Miss Vera Dotson . . . soon to be Mrs. Floyd Barton. That's is . . . if she say yeah.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-06

Time: 2:15

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Relationships

Type 3: Music

Act 2; Scene 6

FLOYD

You was there too, Vera. You had a hand in whatever it was. Maybe all the times we don't know the effect of what we do. But we cause what happens to us. Sometimes even in little ways we can't see. I went up to Chicago with Pearl Brown 'cause she was willing to believe that I could take her someplace she wanted to go. That I could give her things that she wanted to have. She told me by that . . . it was possible. Even sometimes when you question yourself . . . when you wonder can you really make the music work for you . . . can you find a way to get it out into the world so it can burst in the air and have it mean something to somebody. She didn't know if I could do that. If I could have a hit record. But she was willing to believe it. Maybe it was selfish of her. Maybe she believed for all the wrong reasons. But that gave me a chance to try. So yeah . . . I took it. It wasn't easy. I was scared. But when them red lights came on in that recording studio it was like a bell ringing in the boxing match, and I did it! I reached down inside me and I pulled out whatever was there. I did like my mama told me. I did my best. And I figured nobody could fault me for that. Then when they didn't release the record, Pearl Brown left. She thought she had believed wrong. I don't fault her for that. But I never lost the belief in myself.

Then when they released the record I realized I didn't have nothing but a hit record. I come back to you figuring you couldn't say no to a man who got a hit record. But you did. And that made me see that you wanted more than Pearl Brown. I'm here saying I can give it to you. Try me one more time and I'll never jump back on you in life.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-07
Time: 1:10
Type 1: Comedic
Type 2: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 4

RED CARTER

I know how to handle them. I used to have seven women. I tried to keep them separate and give them all a day of the week. But that didn't work. I told one of them, "I'll see you on Tuesday. I got something to do Monday." She say, "Naw, naw . . . I see you Friday night." I told the other one, "I'll see you on Thursday, I got something to do Tuesday." She say, "Naw, naw . . . I'll see you Friday." They all wanted to see me on Friday 'cause I was working. There was a time I couldn't get a woman. I go anywhere near a woman they get up and run. Time I got me a job I couldn't get them off me. Women everywhere. All of a sudden I got right popular . . . except they all wanna see me on Friday. I tried to move my Friday woman over to Sunday, but she got mad. My Sunday woman quit me and my Monday woman wanted to see me on Saturday. I got so confused I say the best thing for me to do was quit my job.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-08

Time: 1:30

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Societal Order

Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 4

RED CARTER

That used to be enough. Get you five pound of cornmeal, a couple of eggs, and some milk - even if it wasn't nothing but powered milk - and make you a meal. Put that with some beans and rice and what more is there? That used to be enough. It used to be all right to have you a rooster. Once upon a time in America it used to be all right to have a rooster in your yard. Now that done changed. It used to be you could leave your door open. Now you got to bar the roof. Ain't nothing went right since I broke that mirror. That ain't but three years ago. That's what scares me. I got four more years of bad luck. I was down Seefus . . . lost all my money. I was going good too. At one time I had forty dollars. I started to get up and leave but then I was trying to get forty more. Seem like everything broke down. Look over there. You got . . . One. Two. Three. Look there. You got seven birds sitting on that fence. You can count them. They sitting all in a row. If that dog next door start to howling I know something. It sure hurt me to pawn my pistol. I don't feel right without it. There's too many people out there act crazy. Too many people with knives. Ice picks. Meat cleavers and everything else. They had one fellow got in a fight with somebody and pulled a hatchet out from under his coat.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-09
Time: 1:15
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 2

RUBY

My mother sent me a letter from Elmore. He had the nerve to write me. I can't stand no jealous man. I ain't done nothing to make him jealous. He was always like that. He was jealous when I met him. He don't know that just make you wanna leave him quicker. He trying to hold on to you and end up driving you away. Elmore started to get mean, so I left him. Everybody seen me and Leroy together and knew I had quit Elmore. I told Leroy Elmore was jealous of him. He say he didn't care. Say he still loved me. Asked me who did I love. I told him the truth. I didn't love neither one of them. They both was nice in their own ways. Then they got into a fight. I tried to tell them Ruby don't belong to nobody and Ruby ain't gonna take but so much of anybody. After the fight I saw Elmore and he asked me where Leroy was. Say he wanted to go make up. I told him Leroy was at the barbershop and he went up there and shot him before Leroy could have a chance to say anything.

The problem with Elmore was he never could get enough of me. He used to tell me he wanted to take it all so nobody else could have me. He wasn't gonna leave none for nobody else to hear him tell it. That make you feel funny to be with a man want to use you up like that.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-10

Time: 2:45

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Women's Status/Identity

Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 2

VERA

It wasn't nothing to you but it was something to me. To have you just up and walk out like that. What you think happened to me? Did you ever stop to ask yourself, "I wonder how Vera doing--I wonder how she feel?" I lay here every night in an empty bed. In an empty room. Where? Someplace special? Someplace where you had been? The same room you walked out of? The same bed you turned your back on? You give it up and you want it? What kind of sense does that make?

You had what you want and I didn't. That makes you special. You one of them special people who is supposed to have everything just the way they want it.

. . . Floyd. I wanted to know where you was bruised at. So I could be a woman for you. So I could touch you there. So I could spread myself all over you and know that I was a woman. That I could give a man only those things a woman has to give. And he could be satisfied. How much woman you think it make you feel to know you can't satisfy a man?

So he could say, "Yes, Vera a woman." That's what you say, but you never believed it. You never showed me all those places where you were a man. You went to Pearl Brown and you showed her. I don't know what she did or didn't do, but I looked up and you was back here after I had given you up. After I had walked through an empty house for a year and a half looking for you. After I would lay

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myself out on that bed and search my body for your fingerprints. “He touched me here. Floyd touched me here and he touched me here and he touched me here and he kissed me here and he gave me here and he took me here and he ain’t here he ain’t here he ain’t here quit looking for him cause he ain’t here he’s there! there! there! there!

He’s there. In Chicago with another woman, and all I have is a little bit of nothing, a little bit of touching, a little bit of myself left. It ain’t even here no more, what you looking for. What you remember. It ain’t even here no more.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-11

Time: 1:25

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Women's Status/Identity

Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 4

LOUISE

However it go he make it go that way. He remind me of Henry. That man walked out on me and that was the best thing that happened to me. When he left I told myself say, "If you have to say hello before you can say good-bye I ain't never got to worry about nobody saying good-bye to me no more." I ain't never going through one of them good-byes again. He was standing upstairs in the hallway. Told me say, "I'm leaving." I asked him, "What for? After twelve years. Why you gonna leave after all this time? After you done used me up." He say, "It's something I got to do." Then he went on and gathered up his things. He left a razor and a pair of shoes. They still up there...

He got to the doorway and I told him, "Leave your pistol. Don't leave me here by myself." He ain't said nothing. He took out his pistol and handed it to me. I told him say, "I ought to shoot you." We laughed and then he kissed me good-bye. I ain't seen him since. I got that pistol upstairs now. What I'm trying to tell you is, don't let no man use you up and then talk about he gotta go. Shoot him first.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-12

Time: 2:05

Type 1: Serio-Comedic

Type 2: Societal Order

Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 7

LOUISE

I know it don't take all day to get dressed. I'm dressed. Seem like everybody should be dressed. My mother used to tell me I was gonna be late for my own funeral. She might be right. But then I won't have to worry about getting a seat. I don't know if I can take it no more. They about to drive me crazy. The House of Blues, the Blue Goose, the Red Carter, the dead rooster, the this-that-and-the-other, hurry up and sit down and lets dance and give me a drink and what I got? Who ain't don't know where the other one is or went or ain't going or is going and this one's dead and that one's dying and who shot who and who sung what song and give me another drink and here go a dollar and I ain't got a dime and what's the use and who to do and where ain't you been 'cause being all ain't not telling.

(Vera enters)

And don't you know her and Hedley went to church. I liked to fell out. She say, "Aunt Louise, I'm going to church with Hedley." That child ain't set foot in a church since she was six years old on a Easter Sunday past the time ten years after I had quit going! Then on Thursday they going to the sanitarium. She talked him into going. You know Hedley wouldn't listen to nobody. I tried to talk him into going. You tried to talk him into going. Ain't no telling who else tried to talk him into going. He sit out here with a butcher knife. Sit out here with a machete ranting and raving and carrying on. She come along and he's gonna up and run to the sanitarium. Act like he anxious to get there. I don't understand it.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-13
Time: 2:45
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Progeny
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 1

HEDLEY

My father play the trumpet and for him Buddy Bolden was a god. He was in New Orleans with the boats when he make them run back and forth. The trumpet was his first love. He never forgot that night he heard Buddy Bolden play. Sometime he talked about it. He drink his rum, play his trumpet, and if you were lucky that night he would talk about Buddy Bolden. I say lucky 'cause you never see him like that with his face light up and something be driving him from inside and it was a thing he love more than my mother.

That is how he named me King . . . after King Buddy Bolden. It is not a good thing he named me that. *(pause)* I killed a man once. A black man. I am not sorry I killed him.

He would not call me King. He laughed to think a black man could be King. I did not want to lose my name, so I told him to call me the name my father gave me, and he laugh. He would not call me King, and I beat him hard with a stick. That is what cost me my time with a woman. After that I don't tell nobody my name is King. It is a bad thing.

Everybody say Hedley 'crazy cause he black. Because he know the place of the black man is not at the foot of the white man's boot. Maybe it is not all right in my head sometimes. Because I don't like the world. I don't like what I see from the

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people. The people is too small. I always want to be a big man. Like Jesus Christ was a big man. He was the Son of the Father. I too. I am the son of my father. Maybe Hedley never going to be big like that. But for himself inside . . . that place where you live your own special life . . . I would be happy to be big there. And maybe my child, if it be a boy, he would be big like Moses. I think about that. Somebody have to be the father of the man to lead the black man out of bondage. Marcus Garvey have a father. Maybe if I could not be like Marcus Garvey then I could be the father of someone who would not bow down to the white man. Maybe I could be the father of the Messiah. I am fifty-nine years old and my time is running out. Hedley is looking for a woman to lie down with and make his first baby. Maybe . . . maybe you be that woman for me. Maybe we both blessed.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-14

Time: 1:10

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Men's Status/Identity

Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 2

HEDLEY

Hedley don't go nowhere!

(He flings one of his baskets across the yard. He crosses to Louis and stands in front of her. He slowly balls up the letter and throws it down.)

Hedley don't go nowhere!

My father . . . he take care of the horses. He take care of the horses for the shoemaker. He take care of the horses for the baker. He take care of the horses for the doctor! *(Flings the other basket across the yard)* He go hungry . . . with no bread from the baker. He walk with nothing but the tops of his shoes . . . nothing from the shoemaker. He die while he wait for the doctor to come! All his life he taking care for the shoemaker. He taking care for the baker. He taking care for the doctor. He get sick. My mother call for the doctor. Three days later the doctor come. She tell him, "I thought you was the undertaker. He died two days ago." He say, "Can I pray?" She tell him, "No." That's what I tell you: "No." The white man cannot help me! *(Stomp on the letter and grinds it into the sand with his foot)* It is a plot against the black man! Hedley don't go nowhere!

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-15

Time: 2:05

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Men's Status/Identity

Type 3: Death

Act 2; Scene 4

HEDLEY

When I was a little boy I learn about Toussaint-Louverture in the school. Miss Manning. She say, "Listen, you little black-as-sin niggers, you never each and none of you amount to nothing, you grow up to cut the white man cane and your whole life you never can be nothing as God is my witness, but I will tell you of a black boy who was a man and made the white man run from the blood in the street." Like that, you know. Then she tell us about Toussaint-Louverture. I say I going to be just like that. Everybody say that, you know.

I go home and my daddy he sitting there and he big and black and tired taking care of the white man's horses, and I say, "How come you not like Toussaint-Louverture, why you do nothing?" And he kick me with him boot in my mouth. I shut up that day, you know, and then when Marcus Garvey come he give me back my voice to speak. It was on my father's deathbed, with Death standing there, I say to him, "Father, I sorry about Toussaint-Louverture, Miss Manning say nobody ever amount to nothing and I never did again try. Then Marcus Garvey come and say that it was not true and that she lied and I forgive you kick me and I hope as God is with us now but a short time more that you forgive me my tongue." It was hard to say these things, but I confess my love for my father and Death standing there say, "I ready took him a half hour ago." And he cold as a boot, cold as a stone and hard like iron. I cried a river of tears but he was too heavy to float on them. So I dragged him with me these years across an ocean. Then my father come

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to me in a dream and he say he was sorry he died without forgiving me my tongue and that he would send Buddy Bolden with some money for me to buy a plantation. Then I get the letter from the white man who come to take me away. So I say, "Hedley, be smart, go and see Joe Roberts." We sat and talked man to man. Joe Roberts is a nice man. I told him about Toussaint-Louverture and my father and Joe Roberts smile and he say he had something to give me. And he give to me this.

(He take out a machete that is wrapped in his burlap apron, crosses over, and sits on his stool.)

Now Hedley ready for the white man when he come to take him away.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-16

Time: 2:30

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Men's Status/Identity

Act 2; Scene 5

HEDLEY

Ain't no grave...can hold my body down

Ain't no grave can hold my body down

Ain't no grave...can hold my body down

(He begins to walk around the yard in a circle)

You think the black man a dog in the dust you can kick when you want? I am not a dog! You think you can throw a bone and I run after it. You think I fetch for you and wag my tail for you. The black man is not a dog! He is the Lion of Judah! He is the mud God make his image from. Ethiopia shall stretch forth her wings! The black man is not a dog! I will stir up the dust around me like the eagle stirreth its nest. Like a hurricane I will come through the house. I will make the roof fall! I will stir up the dust around me to let you know I talk this.... *(Shoves the machete up into the air)* Ain't no grave can hold my body down.

The black man is not a dog. You think I come when you call. I wag my tail. Look, I stirreth the nest. I am a hurricane to you, when you look at me you will see the house falling on your head. It roof and its shutters and all the windows broken.

You think the black man is a dog that I will crawl to you? I am a man, woman. I am the man to father your children. I offer you a kingdom! What you say, I am a blind man? I cast my pearls before swine?

(continued)

I am not a blind man! I will not crawl for you. I am a warrior. When I am in the dust, my knees buckle from war, not from a woman! I offer you a kingdom . . . the flesh of my flesh, my seven generations . . . and you laugh at me! You laugh at Joe Louis' father! I offer you to be the Lily of the Valley. To be Queen of Sheba. Queen of the black man's kingdom. You think I am a clown. I am the Lion of Judah!

Satan! I will tear your kingdom down!

Satan! I will tear your kingdom down!

Satan! I will tear your kingdom down!