

Whiplash

a feature screenplay synopsis
by Damien Chazelle

A promising young drummer enrolls at a cut-throat music conservatory where his dreams of greatness are mentored by an instructor who will stop at nothing to realize a student's potential.

Synopsis

Andrew Neiman, a young jazz student at the Shaffer Conservatory in New York, has one dream: to go down in history as one of the world's best drummers. He's therefore thrilled when Terence Fletcher, a famous conductor, invites him to join the conservatory's Studio Band as a core alternate drummer. Fletcher, however, turns out to be anything but an ordinary teacher. He's a sadistic tyrant and Andrew realizes just how much of one when he has a chair hurled at him for failing to keep time.

At a jazz competition, Andrew misplaces the sheet music to "Whiplash," meaning their core drummer can't play. Andrew, however, can—*from memory*—and after a first class performance, Fletcher promotes him to core drummer. But Andrew's joy won't last long... In a typically twisted move, Fletcher bumps Andrew back down to alternate drummer, putting a much less-talented musician in his place. More determined than ever, Andrew breaks up with his girlfriend and practices until his hands bleed. It pays off... After a grueling five-hour audition, during which Fletcher kicks furniture and screams at him, Andrew earns back the core spot.

Andrew arrives late for another competition after his bus breaks down, hires a car, then realizes he left his drumsticks at the car rental office. He races back, retrieves them, but on his way to the theater, his car is broadsided by a semi. He crawls from the wreckage and runs the rest of the way, finally arriving on stage bloody and injured. When he struggles to play, Fletcher coolly dismisses him. Enraged, Andrew attacks Fletcher in front of the audience, which gets him dismissed from the school.

Andrew files an ethics complaint against Shaffer Conservatory and learns that one of Fletcher's former students hanged himself due to his emotional and physical abuse. Andrew agrees to testify as an anonymous witness and Fletcher is fired. Andrew gives up drumming and, months later, stumbles upon Fletcher playing piano in a jazz club. They go for a drink, during which Fletcher explains why he pushed his students so hard: so that they might become the next Charlie Parker. In Fletcher's eyes the greats like Parker wouldn't be discouraged by anything. He then invites Andrew to drum with his band at a jazz festival. Has Fletcher changed? Andrew thinks so, and accepts.

On stage at the festival, Fletcher has two surprises for Andrew. One: he knows he testified against him, and two: they're starting with a piece Andrew doesn't know *and* for which there's no sheet music. Unable to play, Andrew leaves the stage humiliated. But he returns, interrupts Fletcher and cues the band, before launching into a breathtaking solo. Fletcher is taken aback, but in that moment realizes the enormity of Andrew's talent and begins to guide him. As Andrew ends his solo, they share a smile and Fletcher cues the finale.