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A Musical Look Behind the Curtains: A Musical and Production Analysis of CURTAINS by John Kander and Fred Ebb

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A LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAINS: A MUSICAL AND PRODUCTION ANALYSIS OF
CURTAINS BY JOHN KANDER AND FRED EBB

by

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B.M. Music Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2008

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Music.

Department of Music
in the Graduate School
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

A LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAINS: A MUSICAL AND PRODUCTION ANALYSIS OF
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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Master of Music

in the field of Opera/Musical Theater

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TITLE: A LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAINS: A MUSICAL AND PRODUCTION ANALYSIS OF *CURTAINS* BY JOHN KANDER AND FRED EBB

MAJOR PROFESSOR: TIM FINK

This document is a musical analysis of the show *Curtains* by John Kander and Fred Ebb with a look at each major song's structure through the following criteria: form, melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, orchestration, texture, and challenges a music director faces with in regards to vocal coaching and conducting. This production was staged at SIUC in the fall of 2014, and because of the many formats that this book underwent it would have been helpful to have musical research in order to make the path more clear.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Composer and lyricist team, John Kander and Fred Ebb, started a new wave of realism in musical theater after the Golden Age. Most known for composing *Cabaret* and *Chicago*, they had many other musicals that did not receive the same critical acclaim. The shows *Chicago* and *Cabaret* include dark undertones and scandalous characters treated lightly. Set at the time of Hitler's rise to power, *Cabaret* has strong Brechtian ties, and *Chicago* is based on seedy lifestyles of vaudeville performers from the 1920s that dazzled audiences.

John Kander, still alive today, was born in Kansas City Missouri in 1927. Frank Ebb, a New York native, was born in 1928 and passed away during the process of writing *Curtains*. Kander and Ebb collaborated for more than forty years and produced scores for over twenty Broadway musicals.

Curtains opened on March 22, 2007 at the Al Hirshfeld Theater to generally poor reviews.¹ According to Ben Brantley of the New York Times, the production "lies on the stage like a promisingly gaudy string of firecrackers, waiting in vain for that vital, necessary spark to set it off".² Despite the fact that the music was a highlight, the structural flaws in the show, including a lack of emphasis on the murder mystery, confusing and numerous love stories, and the lack of drive within the plot, suffered because of the deaths of Fred Ebb and the original book writer, Peter Stone. The 2014 SIUC production attempted to address these problems by focusing

¹ Kenneth Jones, "It's Curtains for Curtains; Murder Mystery Musical Will Close June 29," *Playbill* (March 19, 2008), <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/116075-Its-Curtains-for-Curtains-Murder-Mystery-Musical-Will-Close-June-29> (accessed December 4, 2014).

² Ben Brantley, "Stagestruck Sleuth, Crazy for Clues and Cues." *Curtains-Theater-Review-New York Times* (March 23, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/23/theater/reviews/23curt.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed December 4, 2014).

on the love story of Aaron Fox and Georgia Hendricks, composer and lyricist, the discovery of Cioffi's skill for directing, and the contrast between the show-with-in-the-show's music opposed to other *Curtains* compositions.

Curtains is a murder mystery musical set in 1959 Boston at the Colonial Theater. The company opened a new musical, *Robbin' Hood*, featuring Jessica Cranshaw, a leading Hollywood star who lacks talent. At the end of the opening number she collapses on the stage and is rushed to the hospital while the producers, composer, lyricist, and financial backer await opening night reviews. The critical reviews leave the cast in a miserable state when word is received from the hospital that Jessica Cranshaw has been murdered. Lt. Frank Cioffi arrives to inform the cast that they are quarantined to the theater and suspects in the murder. During Cioffi's investigation, and while offering insights to improve *Robbin' Hood*, several deaths occur. Aaron Fox and Georgia Hendricks, composer and lyricist of *Robbin' Hood*, struggle to save their marriage and Niki Harris, a rising young star, falls in love with Cioffi. The producer, Mrs. Carmen Bernstein, explains the profit side of show business and belittles her daughter, Bambi. After solving the cases, the cast welcomes Cioffi as a member of their production team, who makes his debut in the finale as the leading man.

CHAPTER 2

LIST SONGS

The list song, a comedic attempt to lighten the plot, informs the audience of a character's emotional contempt towards a notion or opinion. Stephen Citron explains this as “a series of parallel lines adding to the same concept”, but in the modern musical format, the list song is “generally combined with some character elucidation rather than a straightforward list”.³ In the latter case, it becomes Ebb's chance to entertain audiences with wit and satire. In each of the following songs the melody is simple and repeated multiple times to showcase Ebb's talents.

No. 3 WHAT KIND OF MAN

This musical number opens with fortissimo chords on beats one and three. The first major chord descends a tritone in beat three skewing tonality which correlates to the characters' emotional state as they anticipate newspaper reviews. The same musical vamp continues under the singing as they criticize people who choose to be harsh newspaper critics. Kander uses a minor third numerous times as a unifying element in the show. Key areas, starting in C major, modulating to E-flat major in the bridge, and back to C major, as well as the vocal melody, center around the minor third. Melodically finishing a major second below the tonic chord, vocal line cadences represent the unsettled world of the characters. Tied sixteenth-note pick-up rhythms in the accompaniment create disjointedness to the rhythmic structure along with a staccato accompaniment, legato vocal melody, dotted sixteenth-note patterns against triplet rhythms, and the reversal of rhythms in the melody.

³ Stephen Citron, *The Musical From the Inside Out* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1992), 198.

The orchestration adds to the unbalanced nature of this piece by utilizing the bass voices heavily on beats one and three and the treble voices lightly on beats two and four. Over this, the clarinets and trombones act as the tenor obligato while playful, accented motives are heard in the trumpets between vocal phrases. Instrumental flares add variety in the long list of lyrics supplying the mood and internal thoughts of the characters as they verbally express their opinions.

No. 5 THE WOMAN'S DEAD

The company pays tribute to the deceased Jessica Cranshaw through the use of a strophic list song. Attempting to find respectful parting words for the late Miss Cranshaw, they are at a loss for words and instead list all of the reasons they are glad she has departed.

Melodically, the composer uses the harmonic minor scale mostly in step-wise motion, highlighting the descending and ascending minor third interval. The melody rises leaps of a perfect fourth and falls a perfect fifth, with the final pitch of each descending sequence landing on the three pitches outlined by the minor third motive. At a larger glance, the harmonic structure of the piece starts in C minor, rises to D minor and finally finishes in E-flat minor while the pitches in the top voice of the sustained final chords rise from E-flat, to F and G-flat.

Instrumentally, this number is structured much like the stops on an organ, which seems fitting since it is a funeral march. From the start, individual characters sing the vocal line and as the song progresses, voices are added to the melody in unison. At the first key change, the melody is doubled in octaves much like an added 4' or 16' organ stop and at the second key change, the octaves are filled in with descending minor triads adding to the intensity and thickness of the harmony. The orchestra quietly pulses quarter notes in the bass voice and dotted

sixteenth-note rhythms in the treble voice, much like Chopin's funeral march. As the instrumentation builds, the texture becomes murky, making it hard for the actors to hear a clearly defined pulse and challenging to balance. However, this song is vocally unlike any other piece in the show because of its melodramatic nature, escalating into a full operatic chorus.

No. 6 SHOW PEOPLE

The company members are prepared to leave the production and head back to New York City, but the show's producer Carmen Bernstein threatens them in the introduction of this song by listing all of the obligations they must fulfill. The form of the introduction is ABA, where the A sections lists the ethical reasons to stay and the B section lists the legal requirements.

The production number begins when Cioffi enters the scene and tries a complementary approach persuading the cast to stay. Musically, this can be heard from the harmonic shift from F minor in Carmen's intro, to F major at Cioffi's entrance. The minor third motive is outlined yet again in the harmonic key changes from F major, to G major and finally A-flat major.

Melodically, the introduction consists of a chromatic turn motive, which is reversed when the production number begins. To build up the production number, the chromatic turn motive is thickly harmonized by a series of augmented-major-diminished-major chords. This same motive is the base for the transitional material from the dance break into the major *rallentando* section before the kick-line. Major tonic chord with an added seventh and ninth are used on celesta and mallet instruments as sparkling accents between vocal phrases. Metrically, the entire number is in cut time with a contrast between the bright aggressive tempo in the intro to a relaxed shuffle at Cioffi's entrance. Cioffi's starting pitch begins a half step below the implied tonality that is also difficult to sing because of its lower tessitura. The bass line has strong beats on one and three

while the treble voices sustain and glide over the rhythmic foundation. The text ‘show people’, found abundantly throughout the song, is highlighted by a syncopated rest before each statement. Similarly the text ‘lets you know how lucky you are’ finishes each verse with a hemiloa, adding rhythmic interest, and creating a catchy and memorable phrase from the show.

The bright timbre is aided by the major tonic chord in the syncopated rest before each ‘show people’, colored by an added seventh and ninth scale degree. It is rolled both up and down, from the celesta; arpeggiated ascent by the flute; glockenspiel and harp glissandi; sustained alto sax; accented notes in the horns and vibraphone; strong sax section ascension; and tutti glissandi into the sustained chord. Toward the end of the number the composer adds the strings high above the staff acting as an elegant descant while the saxes and horns explode with energetic licks.

From a conducting standpoint, Carmen’s introduction can prove to be difficult because of the numerous stops in the melody for added dialogue. Each caesura in Carmen’s intro must be motivated in order to build momentum for the conductor to follow the singer back into each following phrase. Setting a settled, gentle half-time tempo at Cioffi’s entrance allows room to accelerate and to bring the tempo down to the pulled-back kick-line. When the kick-line tempo is established, the orchestra and cast must work together to pace the accelerando leading to the end of the number. The final phrase of the song expands harmonically in the chorus and cycles through all three inversions of the same chord, this voicing being difficult for the middle and bottom voices.

No. 16 HE DID IT

This list song is different in form than the others in the show. It includes a simple melody that has three different sets of text that are used in canon at the conclusion. Interestingly, the beginning of this song includes the theme from “Show People”, the previous list song separated by ten musical numbers. Attempting to draw a parallel musical cue, Kander uses the first four pitches of the “Show People” theme to build underscoring while the actors are sneaking around the dark theater.

The only song in the production that is in 6/8, the meter gives a lightness to the show which is needed at the beginning of act two, despite the characters being scared and worried about their safety with a killer on the loose. This is an example of Kander and Ebb’s ability to juxtapose the seriousness of a situation with the playfulness of the orchestration. The woodwinds exchange melodic and harmonic ideas in the underscoring that gives the impression of people not only tip-toeing around the theater with the fear that any one of them could be the next victim.

No. 17 IT’S A BUSINESS

This musical number is sung by the producer, Carmen, to her daughter Bambi and Lt. Cioffi when Carmen explains all of the reasons why she continues to produce musicals. As with the other list songs, it is strophic in form and begins with a recitative-like introduction. Melodically, the opening three phrases, similar in structure, are followed by an ascending sequential pattern of four smaller phrases. After the introduction, the melody alternates a minor second giving the song a speech-like quality while also allowing room for the many verses of

lists to be easily lyricized. As the phrases progress in each verse, they expand in range which allows the character to emotionally unleash.

The accompaniment has a ragtime piano feel in the lower voice with seventh chords and tritone alternations in the treble voice. Each interlude is based on the dominate chord sustained over many measures resolving to the tonic chord at the beginning of the new verse, a welcoming arrival. The ragtime accompaniment gives the tune a bouncy and boastful feel while the brass echoes the melody of the title after the singer. Later in the number, chorus men sing this same phrase beginning in unison and later in four-part harmony. This is another attempt to keep the ear stimulated throughout the repeated verses. The singer can easily tire because of the long nature of the list song and must be aware of pacing themselves in order to produce clear diction and avoid vocal fatigue. The addition of the male chorus helps with this process, but the four-part harmonies are difficult because of the numerous seventh chords and odd voice leading.

CHAPTER 3

LOVE SONGS

THE OBLIQUE LOVE SONG

No. 7 COFFEE SHOP NIGHTS

This love song would be classified as an ‘oblique love song’ according to Citron because in modern musical theater “our love songs have to illuminate character while they carry the plot further in a fresh way.”⁴ Cioffi describes the late hours and loneliness of his career in an attempt to win over the heart of Niki.

Structurally, the song is a two-part form with a musical interlude, including dialogue, and a coda. The A section is conversational in nature while the B section has a lilting melody in triple meter. The melodic structure in the A section alternates between *mi* and *do* before finishing on *re*, which creates an antecedent characteristic to the section. The following B section, which is in a new key, is subsequently the consequent section that follows a slow descent on a major third pattern: *mi-re-do*.

The key signatures within this song alternate between E major and D-flat major before finishing in D major. The modulation from E to D-flat major is particularly interesting because Kander uses the third scale degree (G-sharp) to build a dominant seventh chord in D-flat. To return back to E major, the seventh scale degree (in D-flat) is lowered resulting in an F diminished sonority, which leads to a B7 chord that resolves in E major. Finally, the transition from D-flat major to D major begins with raising the fifth scale degree to create an A7 chord that resolves to D major.

⁴ Ibid., 205.

Rhythmically, the A section is in common time while Cioffi is somewhat conversing about his mundane life, and the B section, in 9/8, describes his search for romance with limited spare time. The orchestration adds to this same affect with pizzicato strings, plucked guitar, marimba and bass all in the A section which is contrasted with sustained wind instruments and rolling chords in the B section.

The transitional points between the duple meter into the triple meter prove to be difficult for the conductor, carefully managing the rubato while setting the new tempo in each section. It is also important that the vocalist knows when they have the freedom to back-phrase within the melody and when they need to vertically align with the orchestra.

No. 22 A TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

This number breaches the realm of a production number because of its dream sequence, large form and multiple dance breaks, but it is strongly rooted in the ‘oblique love song’ genre. The lyrics, “You and I we could be a tough act to follow. Can’t you see?” lead the audience to believe that both Cioffi and Niki are in love, but, because of the actuality of two people falling in love over a matter of hours, the lyricist instead paints a portrait of possibly being in love to convince the audience that this love affair will endure.

The orchestration starts with a simple piano solo that mimics the same rhythmic pattern as the opening sequence of “Singin’ in the Rain”, foreshadowing the possibility of both ballroom and tap dancing, and segues into a fox trot feel in the rhythm section complete with snare drum brushes, muted brass, rolling celesta and harp glissandi. Just as the production number builds, so does the instrumentation, from solo piano, to lush harmonies played by all instruments in the dream sequence.

The melody consists of large leaps of fifths and sixths before relaxing into smaller intervals at the ends of each phrase. There are seven key changes throughout this number and each change elevates the energy into a new section of singing or dancing. From a harmonic standpoint, it is interesting that every major tonic chord has an added seventh or ninth scale degree along with the use of half diminished seventh chords that fall through descending chromatic progressions. Notably, the choral ensemble harmonies encompass minor seventh and half-diminished seventh chords proving to be the most complex ensemble singing in the entire production.

Most of the song is written in cut time with a dance break that begins in 4/4 leading into a waltz before returning to the original meter. Rhythmically, the use of swung and straight eighth notes give a very different feel between the soft-shoe and big band swing sections. Typically, a quarter rest is found at the beginning of each sung phrase giving syncopated emphasis to the rhythmic quality of the song and also charm and class to the character.

Interestingly, this song includes a dream sequence built in a mirror-like form, as if the characters are stepping through the mirror, actualizing their romance and returning to reality after being changed by the emotional effect of the dream, optimistic about their future together. The music supports this not only in form but also instrumentation. The solo piano “Singin’ in the Rain” motive returns at the end when both characters have snapped out of their dream, finishing as delicately as it began.

THE REFLECTIVE LOVE SONG

No. 4 THINKING OF HIM

The reminiscing of past love affairs has a strong emotional connection to nostalgic moments in life and the reflective love song allows the character ‘to recall his/her own love affair while observing the emotions of the principals in the subplot’.⁵ “Thinking of Him” is from the *Robbin’ Hood* score and parallels Aaron and Georgia’s relationship through the eyes of Georgia. Both Maid Marian (*Robbin’ Hood*) and Georgia struggle with their thoughts toward Rob Hood and Aaron. By the conclusion of the song, both Maid Marion and Georgia realize it might be time to think of themselves and how to build a future without a man in their lives.

The simple musical form contains a melodic structure built on a descending augmented fourth and minor sixth, suggesting a riff in the relationship. This unsettled feeling is supported by the use of many jazz chords with added sevenths that flow between many keys related to D-flat major. However, a repeated D-flat pedal tone in the bass suggests the obsessive thoughts of the character. Kander also uses diminished chords built on the second scale degree to function like a minor iv chord. In fact, the only major IV chord in the piece is not heard until the climactic build of the song under the lyrics ‘living for him’. In addition, as the character’s emotional state is heightened as the harmonic structure that began as a four measure chord progression at the beginning of the song is sped up to fit within two measures.

Image: I – I aug – vii – ii dim

The second and third phrase of the vocal line have very unique progression patterns:

I7 – iii – V/ii – ii – V7 – I7

⁵ Ibid.

(I7) – V/III – III – ii7 – iii7 – ii7 – V7

The harmonic structure is either expanding through augmented intervals or collapsing through diminished intervals. The pattern resembles both ladies' desire to be with the man they love and the realization that his love might be unattainable.

The composer uses triplet patterns which work effectively in both elongating and quickening time while maintaining the slow feeling of two beats per measure. These patterns are transferred back and forth between the voice and solo instruments in the orchestra. At the start, solo piano is heard while the instrumentation is slowly layered beginning with double reeds, guitar, clarinet, flute, horn, trumpets and finally trombones on the repeat of the A section. There is no trap set or other percussive instruments used in this number. The harmonies are lush, even in the thinly orchestrated sections, and have to be carefully balanced to hear the jazz voicing.

This song is full of rubato and the conductor must subdivide within the *rallentando* sections as well as carefully move the accelerando sections. Bringing out the two against three rhythms will help bring out the characters' internal struggle between conflicting emotions, but since some instruments double the vocal line it is helpful to communicate to the instrumentalists when they play the melody.

Some vocal challenges include the initial descent in Georgia's first phrase. The pitches are quite low, and consistency of timbre throughout the range of the voice can be difficult. Also, the chorus enters on the last dominant seventh chord of the song on a closely voiced chord. Finding these pitches at the tail end of the number can be difficult, as well as sustaining and shaping the final resolution.

No. 11 I MISS THE MUSIC

Aaron, the composer, opens up about the things that he misses: music, song writing, and his wife and writing partner. The theme from this song follows Aaron through the rest of the show. Between the Los Angeles preview and Broadway opening of *Curtains*, Fred Ebb died of a heart attack in his home at the age of 76. Kander added a beautiful memorial in the middle of the song that described his collaboration and partnership with Ebb. One of his lyrics is “She writes a line, you play a vamp” and then a signature Kander vamp is heard which closely resembles the opening vamp from “Wilkommen” in *Cabaret*. Kander, rather than using a vamp as a safety for the actors, he created musical identifiers to inform the audience of character traits, scenic tension, and emotional objectives. It is as if the composer is reaching through two layers of musical theater production to touch the audience’s ears directly, making this moment very special in the show.

This song starts with two phrases sung by Aaron as he explains to Cioffi the art of composing songs for a musical. It is written as if Aaron is composing the song in an impromptu manner. The actual song’s form is AABA, with an added book scene followed by a repeat of the A section. The melody outlines an F major triad with intervals in each phrase progressing outwardly from a fifth to an octave before it digresses into a seventh and finally a second. Within the B section, the phrase ends with resolutions on the pitches A and B or A-flat and B-flat in the new key.

In the introduction, the key signature raises from D to E-flat as Aaron’s frustration increases, with an abundance of rolled chords on the piano that outline major triads with an added sixth. The minor third motive is present in the intro as well, when the vocal line descends

a minor third at the end of each phrase while the bass line ascends a major third in opposition. This showcases the struggle in the character's relationship to the woman he loves. Overall, tonal centers drop a minor third from F major to D major, similar to the vocal melody in the introduction, while a modulation from D-flat major to F major is reminiscent of the ascending bass line in the introduction. However, by the end of the song when Aaron made a new discovery, the tonal center raises a half step to G-flat major. Kander again uses many half diminished seventh chords but centers the overall chordal progression around I-ii⁷-V⁷-I.

Metrically, the introduction is in cut time with the vocal line written in a recitative format. Triplet rhythms give a sense of uncontrollable outpouring of thoughts and expressions. However, at the end of each phrase, the melody falls into a duple pattern that again highlights the outlining of the minor third motive in the vocal and bass line. The song proper is written in common time throughout and the rhythm of the vocal line follows a short-long-short-long-long patten in contrast to the conversational syllabic rhythms of the introduction. There is a reprise of the rhythmic pattern of "Coffee Shop Nights" in the B section, which is the section Kander inserted after Ebb's death. This takes the song back to a more conversational moment while Kander pays tribute to the artistic relationship between himself and Ebb. Within the A sections of the song, rolling chords ascend in a subdivided manner, which allow great flexibility and nuance throughout the piece.

This song contains the thickest orchestration in the entire production, ranging from simple sections with solo piano to lush harmonies in the sustained winds and countless countermelodies and flourishes in all sections of the orchestra. The conductor must skillfully control the recitative sections in the introduction and B section, the rolling eighth notes in the A

sections and dictate every aspect of rubato within the song. Because of the thick orchestration, it is easy to overpower the vocalist. The orchestra must play as dry, clean, and softly as possible while maintaining a beautiful tone quality. This song also sits very high in the tessitura for the vocalist and requires both delicate and powerful singing in that extreme range, which leads to quick fatigue if over rehearsed.

THE LOVE SONG

No. 21 THINKING OF MISSING THE MUSIC

At this point in the arc of Aaron and Georgia, Kander combines the melodies of “Thinking of Him” and “I Miss the Music”. However, Aaron sings both melodies, starting with “Thinking of me” and transitioning into “I missed the music, I miss my friend” while Georgia adds subtle supporting harmonies. Compositionally, this is a way of showing that Aaron has emotionally triumphed and is capable of loving Georgia again. In the final moments of this number, both characters are singing Aaron’s theme, but the orchestra plays Georgia’s motive through the final bars of the song.

Arguably this is the only song in the production where two people fall in love, or in this case re-fall in love, by the end. The journey of Aaron and Georgia is completed; both characters have achieved their goals through all of the obstacle, representing their final union.

CHAPTER 4

REPRISES

A reprise of a song is intended to remind the audience where the character's journey started and how it has changed.⁶ Typically, they appear in the second act and *Curtains* is no exception. In the traditional sense, a reprise uses the same lyrics as previously stated in the show, but in this score many of the lyrics are altered slightly to match the manifestation of each character's emotions. Reprising a familiar melody increases the likelihood of the audience remembering a tune in that instance and also after the show has finished. Many of the reprises in *Curtains* act as production numbers, mostly found in *Robbin' Hood*, and therefore will be listed in the following section. However, there are three short musical numbers that function solely as reprises.

No. 19 SHE DID IT REPRISE

This very brief reprise only consisting of four measures is used for comedic purposes after the naïve Niki is found holding a gun that she supposedly found. The cast jumps into song singing, "She did it. She did it... That Niki is tricky and slick". The melody and key are identical to the original song except for the lack of the large three-part canon. Simple in nature, the company sings in unison and the orchestra plays repeated F major chords.

No. 26 SHOW PEOPLE REPRISE

Another simple reprise, lasting only sixteen bars, is a very touching duet between Carmen and Cioffi. The melody is identical to the original musical number, but the tempo is slowed dramatically to spotlight the acceptance of Cioffi as a 'show person' by the brassy producer,

⁶Ibid., 207.

Carmen. The orchestration is speckled with simple rolled chords on the piano, as if Carmen attained the ability to play this song herself in the Boston theater, and a solo clarinet representing the loneliness of an empty stage.

There is a small issue with the beginning of the song, in that no starting pitch or sonority is given before the vocalist enters. In the SIUC production, a bell-tone was given with the singer's starting pitch, but the actor could also start the phrase in a spoken voice until the tonal center is heard.

No. 26A TRANSITION TO STAGE

This musical cue begins the finale sequence of the show, but also acts as a reprise in a cinematic way. A reprise of the overture, heard at the start of *Curtains* and also *Robbin' Hood*, it is used to signify the passage of time as Georgia leads the cast in singing "Wide Open Spaces" and the actors in *Robbin' Hood* prepare for the final performance. In this newly improved version of the production, the choral harmonies leading into the underscoring for the scene are embellished in the final sustained chords.

CHAPTER 5

PRODUCTION NUMBERS

Production numbers contribute to the spectacle in musicals by combining the elements of song and dance with a large number of the cast onstage and possibly the addition of a major scenic element that is worked into the staging. Usually they are performed with lavish costumes, repetitive choruses and constant modulation of keys to heighten and sustain the energy throughout the long number. The composer and lyricist frequently write these numbers last, “because they are difficult for artists to create since they must use accessible tunes and will end up as a product of the choreographer’s or director’s art”.⁷

No. 2 WIDE OPEN SPACES

This musical number presents the finale of *Robbin’ Hood*. It is production number structured in a generic western-march style with strong beats on one and three. The overall form is AABA and is repeated three times; the last iteration contains a coda.

The melody in the A section is based on a major seventh chord in C major, followed by a G7 chord. It is mostly tonal and diatonic, utilizing skips of a third and step-wise motion. Kander uses an arpeggiated D7 chord, which is also a V of V chord in C major, to parody the Rogers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma* production number.

Harmonically the number begins in C major and ends in C major which leaves it harmonically closed and somewhat two-dimensional. This helps add to the flatness of the *Robbin’ Hood* production, with the only harmonic areas of interest being a few augmented seventh chords on the fifth scale degree. The obligato voicing in the tenor line of the

⁷ Ibid., 216.

orchestration, the ascending scale prior to the vocal entrance built around the dominant seventh chord in C major, and the use of contrary motion in the coda create a strong drive to the end, all similarities to *Oklahoma*.

Timbre and orchestration are vital to the success of a production number as they must consistently excite the audience. In this number, the rhythm section drives the pulse with strong beats on one and three and guitar on the off beats. The horns play the legato tenor obbligato voice, while the trumpets have accented statements between vocal lines. The reeds have the most exciting and varying motives including moving eighth-note passages that sustain energy through long vocal notes. The overall texture is bright, in a major key, and the vocalist vowel choices are brightened to exaggerate the Midwestern accent. The latter can become difficult and a balance must be found so the vowels do not sound too cartoonish or possibly incomprehensible. Another challenge is determining the level of ‘bad acting’ for this number since the characters are all being coerced to perform. The ensemble attempts to sound under-enthused, while keeping the integrity of professional Broadway musical theater performers.

No. 9/16A/22D/22E/24 IN THE SAME BOAT

These five musical numbers showcase the creation of a production number through the show. In No. 9, the melody consists of a trio of women singing tight harmonies, in No. 16A, it becomes a simplified unison line for three male voices, in No. 22 D & E, it becomes yet another unison melody with two verses. Finally by No. 24, all three melodies are combined to create a melodically stunning production number. They all follow the same harmonic progression: I – IV – V – I, making it possible to combine all three counter melodies. The first melody is rhythmically more complex than the others and covers a wide range by descending an octave

into the third phrase and ascending an octave into the final phrase. The second melody is much like a tenor obbligato from a Rodgers and Hammerstein's score but in contrary motion to the written obbligato in the orchestration. It utilizes chromatic stepwise motion between ascending and descending phrases. The third melody is the most contained in the pitch set. It also consists of ascending and descending chromatic intervals that help lead to its very concise pitch set. In No. 24, Cioffi discovered that it would be best to combine all three versions of the song into one big production number. This works because the previous three melodies have been created to the same accompaniment and work well as partner songs. In the completed number, each melody is introduced individually and then combined at the end making it difficult to balance the number of voices on each melody. For Cioffi, as he is running around on stage helping to stage each part of the number, he is jumping back and forth between melodies, so, it is almost as if Cioffi needs to think of his own section as an individual fourth melody.

No. 13 THATAWAY

This production number serves at the largest dance feature in the show. At this point, Madame Marian starts to sing about her tactics to get her man back.

The A section is melodically based on a descent from scale degree seven to scale degree six. The seventh scale degree is preceded by an upper neighbor, and the sixth scale degree by a lower leading tone. The half step is then consistent in opposing intervocalic settings. In the B section the melody outlines a turn motive from A – G-sharp - B – A. The men enter singing a slower countermelody that is very similar to “Goodnight Ladies” from *Music Man*. After the men finish, both melodies are sung in tandem.

Harmonically, the piece transitions from E – F – G-flat – G, another statement of the minor/major third motive at play. There are two areas of interest, the first being the beginning of the A section which starts in the relative minor key but changes with the fourth phrase into the major key, and in the men's section, the countermelody outlines seventh chords in long sustained phrases.

Since this is a dance feature, the rhythmic drive of the song is important. It is written in 4/4 meter, but felt in two. There are always three preceding quarter-note pick-ups that lead into an eighth-note rhythm, giving deliberateness to the rhythm that drives the song. In the men's section sustained whole notes add a contrast to the rhythmically complex women's melody. There are also some ragtime moments in the piano with the syncopated accents on the 'and' of beat three, giving the impression of three against two.

The orchestration in this number consists of a strong bass line outlining the I and V chords; trumpet licks have a teasing effect through the alternation between half steps, ragtime piano spots, saloon piano tremolo, banjo smears, reed accents between vocal phrases, and Dixieland big brass sections in the dance break. The texture consists of simple rhythmic ideas under the voices that builds with the addition of the men's countermelody. The vocal harmonies thicken towards the big 'pull back' section and the final sustained vocal chord hints at a train whistle.

As in any dance feature, it becomes difficult to sustain the company's vocal integrity while athletically moving around on stage. If the right technology is available it is possible to use off stage voices or perhaps record and re-play a track, but if not, then it can become difficult for the singers to sustain all of the harmonies needed in this number.

No. 18 KANSASLAND

In *Robbin' Hood*, this music number is titled “The Fort Henderson Square Dance”. It is a musical number about the lack of female attention that is given to the men in Kansas. Belling, the director, and Carmen have agreed to rehearse this number with the addition of Bambi and Bobby trying out a *pas-de-deux* in hopes to improve the number. The number starts with the typical open string double stops on a fiddle and the square dance follows.

The form of this number is ABABA followed by a dance feature. The verses are spoken as if a square dance announcer was setting the scene. The melodic nature of the chorus is built around the tonic triad and stays within the range of an octave.

Harmonically, this number travels through thirteen different keys to keep a simple melody fresh. In the dance sequence, the harmonic structure is complex as it passes through many sections, similar to “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue”. There are numerous open fourths, as well as borrowed, lower seventh chords accented for emphasis, and the use of the pentatonic scale adds to the folk-like quality. The overall chord progression is a basic I – V, but Kander plays up the stereotype of Native American music by consecutive chords containing open fifths in the ‘Princess Kickapoo’ section.

Most of the piece is in cut time which helps achieve the square dance or polka feel. The ends of phrases contain a quarter rest followed by two quarter-note chords as punctuation. In the “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue” section, the tempo is half as fast which gives it a totally different feeling of seduction and charm.

The orchestration starts with the open fiddle, with the bass line on beats one and three and the banjo keeping a steady rhythmic pattern, a sustained harmonica to add to the western feel,

tutti accents at the ends of phrases, tom-tom solos that play on Native American drumming, horn rips on the interval of a major seventh, trumpet flutter tonguing, dulcimer sections that hint at the dance of seven veils, pentatonic xylophone melodies similar to *Rodeo*, and ascending brass glissandi followed by drum solos that accompany the acrobatic dancing. The dance portion of this number is one of the few times in the production that the orchestra can play loudly without fear of overshadowing a vocalist.

As with any piece that has a dance feature, a major challenge is consistency in tempi. It is crucial to keep a steady pulse for the dancers. Another challenge at the top of the number is determining the correct amount of lateral vowel to use to achieve the Midwestern accent, but not a farcical level.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY

Throughout this project I served as vocal director, music director, orchestra conductor and rehearsal pianist. In order to serve in all four capacities, it was important to carefully plan and schedule each rehearsal to meet the needs of the director and cast. One of the advantages to serving as rehearsal accompanist was the ability to keep consistent tempos throughout the rehearsal process and become familiar with the score.

As a music director, collaboration is key to a successful production. This project went to the extreme collaborative realms in order to satisfy a director who chose to offer a new perspective on the show. There are many instances within the script and score that leave unanswered questions. In an attempt to bridge these gaps there was some reorganization of the score to fit the wishes of the director. Because of these changes, it became imperative to discuss markings with the cast, edit orchestral parts, record dance breaks for the choreographer and convey differences to the design team. It can be cumbersome to please a difficult director while obeying copyright restrictions. The biggest lesson learned was being available for artistic input and new perspectives but asking permission from the composer or publisher when major changes are being discussed.

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