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Scholarly Program Notes on the Graduate Recital of Richard Lisenby

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SCHOLARLY PROGRAM NOTES ON THE GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL OF
RICHARD LISENBY

by

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

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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

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in the field of Opera/Musical Theatre

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

RICHARD LISENBY, for the Master of Music degree in OPERA/MUSICAL THEATRE, presented on JULY 2, 2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: SCHOLARLY PROGRAM NOTES ON THE GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL OF RICHARD LISENBY

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. David Dillard

This is a broad study of the repertoire preformed at the Graduate Recital of Richard Lisenby on April 19th 2015. The research in this paper covers biographical information for each composer as well as a general look at larger works and musical analysis of the individual pieces.

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CHAPTER 1

MOZART, LEHÁR, LALO, AND SULLIVAN

Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden from *Die Zauberflöte*

W. A. Mozart (1756-1791) composed twenty-one operas during his relatively short lifetime. His work in opera laid a foundation, which subsequently informed the German Romantic movement, influencing Weber's style all the way to Wagner. "... His extensive finales became the model for Rossini, Donizetti and Verdi in Italian style and Weber, Wagner and Richard Strauss in the German school, followed by virtually every other operatic composer right up to present day."¹

Die Zauberflöte was Mozart's final opera. Due to its dialogue, the opera is now referred to as a singspiel. However, at the time of its premiere the term singspiel simply "stood for any kind of musical theatre in any language without regard to dialogue or recitatives." Mozart referred to the work as "deutsche Oper" simply meaning German Opera.² *Die Zauberflöte* is an allegorical tale in which Mozart and librettist Emanuel Schikaneder carefully inlaid numerous allusions to Freemasonry.³ *Die Zauberflöte* is the story of how prince Tamino sets out to save princess Pamina, aided by the birdman Papageno with the protection of a magic flute, which was given to him by the Queen's Three Ladies. Though the Queen has deemed Sarastro as Pamina's evil captor, it is she who is evil. Ultimately, Pamina is saved and the Queen is defeated and banished.

¹ Myer Fredman, *From Idomeneo to Die Zauberflöte: A Conductor's Commentary on the Operas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 15-19.

² Simon P. Keefe, *The Cambridge Companion to Mozart*. Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157.

³ Julian Rushton, "Zauberflöte, Die." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, (accessed June 15, 2015).

“Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden” occurs in Act Two as Sarastro’s evil servant Monostatos tries to kiss Pamina as she sleeps. Eventually, he is stopped by Pamina’s mother, the Queen of the Night. The aria is strophic, containing two verses, consisting of quick thirty-second note chords in the strings, which underscore the flute’s fast melismas. Though the rapid tempo provides a feeling of chaos, the dynamic marking is *sempre pp possibile*. This combination works to create the juxtaposition between Monostatos’ excitement and his desire not to wake the sleeping Pamina. The phrases are choppy and irregular and possibly represent Monostatos’ unintelligent or clumsy nature.

The voice emerges in an extremely unusual way from this sensually intoxicating activity in the orchestra with even its meter strenuously avoiding all sense of symmetry. Particularly significant in this context is the brutally ejaculated dotted crotchet at the beginning of the phrase ‘Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden.’ In the most general terms, the whole of the melodic structure has something disorganized, even chaotic about it, notably at the very beginning. It writhes around the note c with dogged savagery, touching on the other degrees of the scale in a fairly primitive order. In this way, the most extreme figure in the opera is raised from the depths of an ordinary comic singspiel... and is elevated to the heights of the true art of characterization, yet without abandoning the field of the simple singspiel song... proof of Mozart’s ability to develop the most striking character portraits on the basis of these simple songs.⁴

<p>Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden, Schnäbelt, tändelt, herzet, küßt; Und ich soll die Liebe meiden, Weil ein Schwarzer häßlich ist Ist mir denn kein Herz gegeben? Ich bin auch den Mädchen gut! Immer ohne Weibchen leben, Wäre wahrlich Höllenglut. Drum so will ich, weil ich lebe, Schnäbeln, küssen, zärtlich sein! Lieber, guter Mond – vergebe Eine Weiße nahm mich ein!</p>	<p>Everyone is loving, kissing, Flirting, cuddling, feeling joy; And for me all that is missing: Black means I’m an ugly boy. Will no heart be mine? What, never? I could treat the girls so well! Being with no wife forever, That would be a living hell. So, as long as I am living, I want kisses, tenderness! Moon, I hope you’ll be forgiving Here’s a white girl in distress!</p>
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⁴ Albert Hermann, Stewart Spencer, and Cliff Eisen. *W.A. Mozart*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1282.

Weiß ist schön! – ich muß sie küssen; Mond! verstecke dich dazu! Sollt es dich zu seh'n verdrießen, O so mach' die Augen zu! <i>Text by Emanuel Schikaneder</i>	I must kiss her – white is pretty! Let your veil, O moon, be drawn! If the sight moves you to pity, Shut your eyes and don't look on. <i>Translation by Lea Frey</i>
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Lippen Schweigen from *Die lustige Witwe*

Die lustige Witwe was composed by Austro-Hungarian Franz Lehár (1870-1949) with libretto by Victor Léon and Leo Stein. Lehár is considered the leading composer of operetta in the 20th century and is credited with reviving the genre. The show opened in Vienna in 1905 and was Lehár's first international hit.⁵ Interestingly, the story takes place in the same year that the opera premiered and is the story of a young woman named Hanna, who is the widow of the richest man in Pontevedro. Hanna has many suitors due to her fortune. Danillo, her former lover, does not care about her money but is reluctant to confess his love to her because he does not want her to think he is also after her money. Eventually, Danillo and Hanna confess their love to each other and sing the love duet "Lippen Schweigen." "The complete novelty of The Merry Widow lies in the frankly erotic nature of its subject, and in the ingenious boldness with which the vibrant sensuality of the story is musically interpreted."⁶

This piece is intimate, yet grand. The writing displays rich orchestration while keeping the text simple and meaningful. The ABA waltz duet opens with a beautiful violin motive, which is echoed by the cello, expressing the character's nonverbal

⁵ Andrew, Lamb "Lustige Witwe, Die." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003026> (accessed May 15, 2015).

⁶ Bernard, Grun *Gold and Silver: The Life and times of Franz Lehár*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1970) 119.

communication (“Lippen Schweigen” meaning “Silent Lips”) or simply foreshadowing the dance to come. Unfortunately this exchange between violin and cello is lost in the piano reduction where the cello part is cut completely. “Lehar’s writing contains an eroticism unprecedented in operetta as in the celebrated waltz duet of Act 3 where solo violin and cello symbolically intertwine.”⁷ Once Danillo begins singing, the orchestration transitions to umm-pah chords allowing the audience to pay full attention to the text and melody. When Hannah begins singing in the B section her melody is identical to the one first presented by the violin in the introduction. One of the most notable and memorable parts of the duet occurs at the end where the two sing the melody together in unison. The effect is grandiose and meaningful as the two are finally symbolically in sync.

<p>Lippen schweigen, 's flüstern Geigen: Hab' mich lieb! All' die Schritte sagen bitte, hab' mich lieb! Jeder Druck der Hände deutlich mir's beschrieb, er sagt klar: 's ist wahr, 's ist wahr, du hast mich lieb!</p> <p>Bei jedem Walzerschritt Tanzt auch die Seele mit, da hüpf't das Herzchen klein, es klopft und pocht: Sei mein! Sei mein! Und der Mund er spricht kein Wort, doch tönt es fort und immerfort: ich hab' dich ja so lieb, ich hab' dich lieb!</p> <p>Jeder Druck der Hände deutlich mir's beschrieb, er sagt klar: 's ist wahr, 's ist wahr, du hast mich lieb! <i>Text by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein</i></p>	<p>Lips fall silent, whispering are violins: Love me! All the steps say, Please, love me! Every press of the hands clearly describes it to me: it's true, you love me!</p> <p>With every step of the waltz, The soul will dance along, Then hops my little heart, It knocks and pounds: Be mine, be mine! And my mouth, it speaks not a word, Still it sounds on and on, I do love you. I love you!</p> <p>Every press of the hands clearly describes it to me: it's true, you love me! <i>Translation by Lea Frey</i></p>
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⁷ Lamb.

Vainement, ma bien-aimée from *Le roi d'Ys*

French composer Édouard Lalo (1823-1892) was originally a professional violinist and violist who only became interested in opera when he married mezzo-soprano Julie Besnier de Maligny. The poor reception of his first opera named *grand opéra Fiesque* caused him to shy away from the opera world and focus on a career writing violin concertos and other instrumental works. His second opera *Le roi d'Ys* encountered resistance as opera houses refused to perform it for thirteen years. During this time, Lalo slowly revised the score. When *Le roi d'Ys* was finally staged in 1888 the opera was a huge success and Lalo's music was finally in demand. Unfortunately Lalo died after writing just one act of his third opera *La jacquerie*.⁸

Lalo's style is robust and forceful, and his fresh rhythmic and harmonic invention makes his two early operas impressive, stageworthy works. He was accused, like all progressive composers of his time, of imitating Wagner, but although he admired Wagner, their styles have little in common. As Lalo himself said: 'It's hard enough doing my own kind of music and making sure that it's good enough. If I started to do someone else's I'm sure it would be appalling'. It is certainly a pity that circumstances did not encourage him to compose more for the stage, and a pity too that *Fiesque* still awaits its first performance.⁹

Le roi d'Ys is the story of two daughters of the King of Ys named Margared and Rozenn. Margared is betrothed to Karnac yet confesses to Rozenn that she still loves her childhood friend Mylio who sailed away long ago. Unbenownst to Margared, Rozenn also loves Mylio and has knowledge of his return. During her wedding ceremony

⁸ Hugh Macdonald. "Lalo, Edouard." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O005749>. (accessed May 15, 2015).

⁹ Ibid.

Margared discovers that Mylio has returned and refuses to continue the wedding.

Eventually Margared discovers that Mylio loves her sister Rozenn. She therefore sets out to destroy the city on their wedding day by releasing the floodgates and drowning everyone. In a final moment of regret she sacrifices herself to the ocean and the city is saved.

Mylio sings “Vainement, ma bien-aimée” to Rozenn on the morning of their wedding as her guardians refuse to let him see her before the wedding. He proclaims that if he cannot see her he will die. The A section of this ABAB form aria is in 2/2 and features bouncy staccato thirty-second notes to support Mylio’s excitement and unease. In contrast, the B section is in 3/4 and is very legato and romantic. The simple quarter note accompaniment gives full attention to the singer and even as the accompaniment gets more involved, there is the marking *col canto* (follow the soloist’s time) allowing freedom for the singer to be expressive. At the end of the B section Mylio has an octave jump from A4 to A5. Both occurrences are marked pianissimo suggesting that the dramatic action is more important than the virtuosity of the singer.

<p>Vainemant, ma bien-aimee Puisqu'on ne peut fléchir Ces jalouses gardiennes, Ah, laissez-moi conter Mes peines et mon émoi! Vainement, ma bien-aimée, On croit me déseperer; Près de ta porte fermée Je veux encor demeurer! Les soleils pourront s'éteindre, Les nuits remplacer les jours, Sans t'accuser et sans me plaindre. Là je resterai, toujours! Je le sais, ton âme est douce,</p>	<p>In vain, my beloved Since one cannot sway those jealous protectresses, ah, let me tell my sorrows and my feeling! In vain, my beloved, they think they're making me desperate; near your closed door I still wish to dwell! The suns will die out, the nights replace the days before I reproach you and before I complain. There I will remain, forever! I know your soul is sweet,</p>
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<p>Et l'heure bientôt viendra Où la main qui me repousse Vers la mienne se tendra! Ne sois pas trop tardive à te laisser attendrir! Si Rozenn bientôt n'arrive, je vais, hélas, mourir! <i>Text by Édouard Blau</i></p>	<p>and the hour will soon come when the hand that spurns me will reach out toward mine! Do not be too late in letting your heart soften! If Rozenn doesn't come soon, alas, I'm going to die! <i>Translation by Benjamino Gigli</i></p>
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A Wand'ring Minstrel I from *The Mikado*

Though he wrote in a variety of genres and forms, the English composer Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) is remembered primarily for his work in operetta with connection to librettist W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911). Their operettas have been so successful and their style so uniquely recognizable that Gilbert and Sullivan are often in a category of their own. The pair wrote fourteen operettas featuring memorable melodies, witty lyrics, and often absurd, satirical comedy.¹⁰ The music of their operettas is by no means virtuosic. The simplicity of vocal and instrumental parts made it possible for amateurs to successfully perform them all over the world.¹¹

The Mikado opened in 1885 and ran 672 performances, making it Gilbert and Sullivan's most successful work at the time. The story follows Nanki-poo, the son of the Mikado of Japan, who has run away to avoid marrying an unattractive girl. Disguised as a minstrel singer he unites with his true love Yum-Yum. Unfortunately, Yum-Yum is betrothed to Ko-Ko, a man who is sentenced to death for flirting. Ironically Ko-Ko is also the Lord High Executioner and faces the dilemma of having to execute himself. In the

¹⁰ Michael Hardwick, *The Osprey Guide to Gilbert and Sullivan* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing LTD, 1972)

¹¹ David Russell Hulme. "Mikado, The." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006344>. (accessed June 3, 2015).

end Nanki-poo and Yum-Yum help Ko-Ko to stage his execution so that they can be together.¹²

“A Wand’ring Minstrel I” is sung by Nanki-poo (in disguise as a minstrel singer) as he introduces himself to the people of Titipu. The aria follows an ABCA construction and exhibits a range of styles, meters, and tempos, adhering to the savoy qualities that made Gilbert and Sullivan famous. The A section begins with rolled chords to simulate the strumming of the *samisen*, the Japanese equivalent to the guitar.¹³ The melody has a sentimental feel as Nanki-poo tries to capture the people's attention. The B section begins with the marking of *Allegro marziale* meaning in military style. While the accompaniment consists of short march-like 8th note chords, the melody is patriotic and rousing. By transitioning to cut time and increasing the tempo Sullivan successfully creates a naval feel in section C. Sullivan’s aptitude for embodying military styles likely came from exposure to his father's work as a military band master. He used this skill in many of his operettas.¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hardwick, 136.

¹⁴ Gervase Hughes, *The Music of Arthur Sullivan*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1959) 8.

CHAPTER 2

STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim is one of the most well-known musical theatre composers of our time. Sondheim, born in 1930, spent his summers down the street from Oscar Hammerstein II who personally tutored him for years in music and libretto writing. By age 16 Sondheim had already written four complete librettos with scores under Hammerstein's guidance.¹⁵ After graduating from college, Sondheim spent two years studying with Milton Babbitt, where he learned how to sustain a musical idea over a large span of music, a concept which is evident in most of his later works.¹⁶

Sondheim made his Broadway debut in 1957 as the lyricist for the musical *West Side Story*, where he worked alongside composer Leonard Bernstein, and a year later was asked to collaborate with Jule Styne on the musical *Gypsy*. Shortly thereafter, Sondheim composed the score for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which won the 1962 Tony Award for best musical. In 1971, Sondheim teamed up with Harold Prince to create the musical *Company*. The score won two Tony Awards for best music and one for best lyrics, not to mention four more overall. The success of *Company* ushered in a string of musicals including *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd - The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park With George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), and *Assassins* (2004).¹⁷

¹⁵ Martin Gottfried, *Sondheim*. (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993.) 19-20.

¹⁶ Jim Lovensheimer, "Sondheim, Stephen." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2225586>. (assessed June, 15 2015)

¹⁷ Ibid.

Giants in the Sky from *Into the Woods*

Into the Woods is based on a collection of characters from Grimm's Fairy Tales whose lives intertwine as they each travel into the forest in search of solutions to their individual problems. Inevitably, the characters meet and their problems intertwine. In the song "Giants in the Sky," Jack has just climbed the beanstalk to discover a world where giants live. Jack decides to steal the giants' gold in hopes of bringing his mother out of poverty and finally win her approval. However, the choice to steal eventually results in the destruction of his village and the death of his mother.

"Giants in the Sky" features a mix of emotions as Jack stops to process the experience he just had in the kingdom of the giants. "There are two distinct strains in this song. The main theme is a sly and original variation of traditional theater music. It alternates with an anxious theme set to jittery rhythms..."¹⁸ Traditionally in musical theatre, especially since Rodgers and Hammerstein, musical numbers are used to advance the plot. Yet the fairy tale characters in Act One of *Into the Woods* do just the opposite, pausing to talk about their experiences and what they learned. This design is fitting to the concept of the show. Sondheim states,

Why tell the audience a story they already know unless you dramatize it? Moreover, we never showed Jack (or any of the others) in the course of their adventures: Jack in the Giant's Kingdom, Little Red inside the Wolf's stomach, Cinderella at the ball. James's wife, Sarah suggested that these songs would be more interesting if they dealt with what the adventures *meant* to the adventurers, rather than simply being narrative descriptions... the suggestion gave me a thematic idea which tied all four lyrics together... the experience of learning.¹⁹

¹⁸ Martin Gottfried, *Sondheim*. (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993) 172.

¹⁹ Stephen Sondheim, *Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981-2011) with Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011) 69.

This concept totally changed the framework for “Giants in the Sky,” and Sondheim actually rewrote the song altogether. In the first version of “Giants in the Sky” the text had simply been a narrative of the Jack and the Beanstalk story.

There are several compositional choices that are noteworthy in the construction of “Giants in the Sky.” The song moves in a quick 4/4 time and displays Jack’s frantic yet dynamic thought process. While the song doesn't fit a standard form, it can be divided into two distinct halves. The first half conveys Jack’s excitement while the second half communicates his fear. Jack’s lyrics are unremitting, usually only leaving time for the singer to breathe. This aids in the anxious nature of the character.

In m. 20 the text reads “Big tall terrible giant at the door.” This text is immediately followed by a two measure musical interlude, which includes a theme in the violin part, C-F-G-E-D-F-G-E-D (also known as the bean motive).²⁰ This theme is heard numerous times throughout the musical and in a fragmented form two more times within this song. The occurrence at m. 22 is particularly important because of the text which is attached to it. The theme becomes the main melody in the witches song, “Stay with Me” and even later in “Witches Lament.” While the song itself has an air of excitement, the presence of this theme provides the performer with a justification for underlying fear or unease to underscore the excitement.

Not While I’m Around from *Sweeney Todd*

Sweeney Todd, much like Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, can be viewed as an opera and musical depending on where it is being performed. Sondheim himself has reluctantly

²⁰ Gottfried, 171.

categorized it as a “dark operetta,” and later a “movie for the stage.”²¹ Based on a play adaptation by Christopher Bond of a nineteenth-century melodrama, the musical follows a Victorian era barber who murderously seeks to avenge himself of injustices from many years prior. Unique to this show is an almost sung-through score with dialogue that is usually underscored, producing a horror movie atmosphere immediately relatable to a modern audience.²²

The character Tobias (Toby) who sings “Not While I’m Around,” has been working for Mrs. Lovett at her meat-pie shop. Unbeknownst to Toby, the meat in the pies is being made with the remains of people murdered by Mr. Todd in his barbershop. “Not While I’m Around” occurs near the end of the show and acts as the calm before the storm. “*Sweeney Todd* roars from the finish of this song until the end of the show.”²³ It is written in an AABBA form and has a sweet melodic nature emphasizing Toby’s innocence and love for Mrs. Lovett. Though Toby is very simple minded and possibly mentally handicapped, he intuitively knows that Mr. Todd is evil and believes that Todd will eventually hurt Mrs. Lovett. In m. 39-59 the melodic line has a spoken, declarative quality, which Sondheim used to minimize dialogue without using traditional operatic recitative. “This is dialogue enriched with the rhythmic, metric and poetic qualities of lyrics. To keep the show generally conversational, rhyming is minimized except when there is a set piece.”²⁴ The dissonances which are readily found throughout the show are

²¹ Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954-1981) with Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines and Anecdotes*. (New York: Knopf, 2010) 332.

²² Gottfried, 125.

²³ Ibid, 143.

²⁴ Ibid, 129.

much more gentle in this number.²⁵ The opening half note pulsing major second (Ab-Bb) originally orchestrated for harp is both beautiful and eerie. The melody throughout remains lyrical and is supported by the orchestra until Mrs. Lovett sings it. The underscoring below Mrs. Lovett is a descending dissonant violin line, likely expressing her evil and alluding to her impending death.

Finishing the Hat from *Sunday in the Park with George*

Sunday in the Park with George was Sondheim's first collaboration with book writer James Lapine. Although at this point Sondheim had already created many Broadway shows, Lapine had only written for off-Broadway. This is significant because the pair developed the show in a not-for-profit off-Broadway theatre called Playwrights Horizons, which provided what Sondheim called a nurturing and protective atmosphere that encouraged experimentation. For one of the first times in his career Sondheim did not have to worry about the deadlines, financial backers, and critics involved with writing for Broadway.²⁶ "I found myself writing with more formal looseness than I had before, allowing songs to become fragmentary, like musicalized snatches of dialogue, but avoiding the static verbosity of recitative."²⁷ As a result, *Sunday in the Park with George* is an ingenious statement about the life of an artist.

The story follows the French painter Georges Seurat as he creates his most famous painting *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*, and later his great

²⁵ Carey Blyton, "Sondheim's 'Sweeney Todd': The Case for the Defence." *Tempo* No. 149 (June 01, 1984) 20.

²⁶ Stephen Sondheim, *Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981-2011) with Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011) 4-6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

grandson, also named George, as he struggles as a modern American artist. The song “Finishing the Hat” occurs just after Dot, George’s lover, decides to leave him for a more stable man. The song has a very interesting construction. Sondheim states,

Finishing the Hat is a stream-of-consciousness lyric. There is no complete sentence until the last stanza: each of the preceding stanzas is a subordinate clause. Stream-of-consciousness doesn't think in sentences... A little incoherence seemed appropriate in the case of an artist struggling to reconcile his personal life with his professional one.²⁸

Coinciding with these fragmented lyrics is a driving and repetitive eighth note motive in the piano which only stops three times, each time happening on the word “window.” This is a beautiful example of text painting as George’s constant obsession with his work only makes brief pauses or windows in time in which to relate to the world. He is otherwise steadily drudging on in his eighth note drone. Lastly, the most repetitive word in the song is the word “Hat” which occurs 12 times, each on a short quarter note. Sondheim states that he chose the word specifically for its “jaunty tone,”²⁹

²⁸ Ibid, 30.

²⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

GELD, FLAHERTY, AND GUETTEL

The Only Home I Know from *Shenandoah*

Gary Geld is a composer less known for his work in theatre than for his work in popular music. His successful work on Broadway consists of two shows, *Purlie* in 1970 and *Shenandoah* in 1975. Although *Shenandoah* was nominated for a Tony for best score, it lost to *The Wiz* by Charlie Smalls.³⁰

The musical *Shenandoah* is based on the screenplay with the same name by James Lee Barrett. The story follows Charlie Anderson, a farmer in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley who, though opposed to the Civil War, is forced to fight when his youngest son is captured by Yankee troops. He and his other sons leave home in hopes of saving him. The song "The Only Home I Know," is sung in Act II as Charlie tells a group of prisoners to return home where they belong. Although the song is originally an ensemble piece carried by a corporal, it has been adapted as a solo piece.

The piece is constructed in an AABA form and displays folk-like characteristics. The vocal line begins unaccompanied and is later supported with simple stacked chords. This compositional choice lets the text of the melody take precedence over the music, drawing the listener into the intimacy of the moment. The bridge, consisting of only half note chords, is the simplest accompaniment of the entire song. This choice is an effective means of contrast and sets up the return of the final A section. The piece is very nostalgic, and can be sung beautifully without moving anywhere dramatically or

³⁰ Steven Suskin, "Show Tunes" *The Songs, Shows, and Careers of Broadway's Major Composers Revised and Expanded Fourth Edition*. (Amadeus Press, 1992) 420.

musically. The B section can be used to heighten the conflict and keep the audience engaged in the story.

Our Children from *Ragtime*

Composer Stephen Flaherty has worked as a part of a songwriting team with lyricist and book writer Lynn Ahrens for over thirty years. Their works offer a rich study in contrast and include *Rocky the Musical* (2014), *A Man of No Importance* (2002), *Seussical* (2000), *Ragtime* (1998), *Once on this Island* (1990), and the animated film *Anastasia* (1997). The longevity of their working relationship is uncommon in the modern musical theatre world, resulting in a team more like Rogers and Hammerstein or Lerner and Loewe.³¹

Ragtime the Musical is based on the novel with the same name by E.L. Doctorow, which explores ideals of American culture at the turn of the 20th century. The story follows Coalhouse Walker Jr., an educated African American musician, Mother, a white upper class stay-at-home wife, and Tateh, a Latvian Jewish immigrant artist, each of whom is trying to find a piece of the American dream in the midst of a changing American culture.

In the song “Our Children” Tateh, who has now transitioned from an extremely poor immigrant to a successful motion picture director is spending time with Mother on the beach in Atlantic City while their children play together in the distance. As they find joy in watching their children’s friendship the two grow closer together.

The song, written in D major, has an extremely simple construction compared with the rest of the show. The opening twenty-six measures consist of waltz chords with a

³¹ "The Official Website of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty." Accessed April 11, 2015. <http://www.ahrensandflaherty.com/assets/ahrens-and-flaherty--joint-bio-full-.pdf>

light, flute melody written above. The feeling evoked is carnival-like or perhaps reminiscent of the calliope in a carousel. The uncomplicated nature of Flaherty's design transitions the characters from conversation into song. As the song progresses the accompaniment develops into lush orchestration and the chords become arpeggios, thus transforming this simple conversation into a wistful and meaningful moment between Tateh and Mother. In mm.58-61 the duet has grown to its climax as the two characters sing together "Children run so fast, toward the future, from the past." This text is important because it shows an interesting connection between Tateh, Mother, and their children. Throughout the show, Tateh and Mother struggle with various conflicts which lead the characters to great personal change. In this scene, these adult characters are confronted with the fearlessness of their children and the hope of the future. This is a universal ideal and is an overriding theme in the musical.

How Glory Goes from *Floyd Collins*

Adam Guettel, the contemporary composer and lyricist of the musical *Floyd Collins* (1996), is probably best known for his work *Light at the Piazza*, which premiered at Lincoln center in 2005, receiving six Tony Awards including best original score and best orchestration. Although his music is relatively well known in the musical theatre world, his work has been focused in the non-profit theatre scene and is less known by the public.³²

Floyd Collins is based on an actual historical event in the winter 1925 in which a Kentucky explorer was trapped while trying to discover a new cave to prove his theory

³² Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen, *Directors and the New Musical Drama: British and American Musical Theatre in the 1980s and 90s*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 102.

that many of the caves in the region were interconnected. He was trapped one hundred and fifty feet below ground for three weeks in “Sand Cave.” At the time, the event was exploited by the media making it a national ordeal. Some twenty thousand onlookers gathered in the area creating what was described as a carnival. After spending three weeks underground, Collins died three days before his body was recovered.³³

“How Glory Goes” is the final scene when Collins comes to terms with the reality of his death. The song is for the most part strophic with two verses and a section of new material at the end. He begins the song by directly addressing God, saying “I’m ready now, Lord. I know I warn’t no Sunday school mama’s boy. But faith is hopin’ for somthin’, believin’ what you can’t see.” The opening theme starting at m.8 is an interesting syncopated chordal sequence which creates a very abstract and uncertain feeling. The vocal line joins in with a jarring strong beat on the “and” of beat one. This syncopation points to the character’s panicked psyche. While the piece sounds modern and abstract, Guettel maintains a folk-like musical language staying true to the Kentucky setting. The text setting compliments both the syncopated nature of the accompaniment and the ease and nuance of spoken Kentucky vernacular.³⁴ Perhaps most unique to this piece is the extended yodel sequence at the end representing Collins’ death. The yodel sequence operates in a round with four voices (each a representation of Collins) and is both triumphant and devastating as it represents the end of Collins’ terrible ordeal, while celebrating his life.

³³ Wiley Hausam, *The New American Musical: An Anthology from the End of the Century*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003) 5.

³⁴ Lundskaer-Nielsen, 104.

CHAPTER 4

JASON ROBERT BROWN

Contemporary composer Jason Robert Brown (b. 1970) studied composition at The Eastman School of Music, though he dropped out after only two years. Brown got his start as a professional composer when Daisy Prince, daughter of the legendary Harold Prince, directed his off-Broadway theatrical song cycle *Songs for a New World* in 1995.³⁵ Through his relationship with Daisy, he met Harold Prince which led to the collaboration on his first Broadway show, *Parade* (1998).³⁶ He went on to create *The Last Five Years* (2002), *13 The Musical* (2008), *The Bridges of Madison County* (2014), and most recently *Honeymoon in Vegas* (2015). Both *Parade* and *The Bridges of Madison County* won Tony Awards for Best Original Score. Brown claims his biggest musical influences are gospel, jazz, rock, and show tunes with “some highbrow tendencies.” He also has a deep admiration for Sondheim and Bernstein.³⁷

“It’s Hard To Speak My Heart” from *Parade*

Parade is based on a true story in which a thirteen-year-old factory worker, Mary Phagan, is raped and murdered in April of 1913. Leo Frank, a shy and soft-spoken Jewish man from Brooklyn, who is very uncomfortable living in the South, was Mary Phagan’s boss and is accused of the crimes. Though he is innocent, Leo is convicted and undergoes a two-year struggle to prove his innocence and save his life. Though he was previously

³⁵ Hausam, 350.

³⁶ "Interview: Jason Robert Brown." The Dramatist.
http://oldredhills.tripod.com/parade_dramatistjrb.html

³⁷ Marc Acito, "Musical Moment Interview Series: Jason Robert Brown." Make Musicals.
<http://makemusicals.com/2011/06/musical-moment-interview-series-jason-robert-brown/>. (Accessed May 4, 2015).

not very close to his southern wife, Lucille, this hardship helps the two find a deeper love for each other. Just as Leo is gaining headway in proving his innocence, he is kidnapped by a lynching party and hung from a tree in Mary Phagan's hometown of Marietta Georgia. Brown credits Charles Ives as his biggest inspiration for the musical style of the show.

Ives pushed the frontiers of American symphonic music. He was at the forefront of the rebirth of intellectual culture after the Civil War. Until about 1890 to 1910, there was very little progress in American culture. Europe was going crazy, but America had settled into nostalgia for life before the war. I think that's what Ives and others, like Henry Cowell, were reacting to. When I looked at the period of *Parade*, Ives seemed right, though he was from the wrong milieu. Ives is Massachusetts, and *Parade* is Georgia. I knew I had to adapt his music and make it more Southern, but the stylistic impulse was right, his impulse of all this music happening at the same time: marching bands, rags, and waltzes playing against more sinister, symphonic sounds. I thought that, at heart, the texture of the show should be collisions, many things jumping on top of each other and never really ending. Keys abruptly change, and there are no buttons on any of the songs in the show. Well, maybe two songs have buttons, but it's a show about transitions from one thing to another. There's all this overlapping. There's all this cacophony. I don't think you can put Ives in the theater and have it hold interest the same way that I hope *Parade* does, but I wanted the impulse to be theatrically viable.³⁸

"It's hard to speak my heart" occurs toward the end of Act One in the trial scene as Leo is allowed to make a statement on his own behalf. The stage direction says "For the first time, we see Leo with all his pretensions and affections stripped away."³⁹ Leo is absolutely terrified. The courtroom becomes silent and the song begins with a clocklike quarter note vamp, which underscores the entire song. The vocal line is simple and speech-like as the sparse accompaniment allows for Leo's soft-spoken nature. The accompaniment intensifies with quick, arpeggiated chords as Leo proclaims "I never

³⁸ "Interview: Jason Robert Brown." *The Dramatist*.
http://oldredhills.tripod.com/parade_dramatistjrb.html. (Accessed April 29, 2015).

³⁹ Hausam, 297.

touched that girl” At the end of the song, just as Leo make his strongest claim “I never raised my hand” the accompaniment drops out abruptly leaving Leo in the terrifying silence. As the clocklike quarter note chords return, Leo confesses that he is “incredibly afraid” and begs for their understanding.

Leo was very hard to find musically, to figure out how he sang. I think the problem with our first draft was that Leo never sang. Some people suggest a problem with the show now is that Leo still doesn’t sing enough, but I can’t imagine him singing more than he does. He always seemed to me to be a very buttoned-up, closed person, someone who doesn’t naturally sing.⁴⁰

The Schmuel Song from *The Last Five Years*

The Last Five Years is the story of two young people who fall in love in New York City, get married, and ultimately fall out of love and separate. The story has a unique construction in that the two characters are introduced at opposite ends of a chronological continuum. Cathy begins the musical at the end of the relationship moving backwards through time while Jamie begins at the start of the relationship moving forward through time. The audience is given glimpses of the relationship from both characters’ perspectives. The only time the two characters sing together occurs in the middle of the show with the song “The Next Ten Minutes” just after Jamie proposes and the two stories intersect.

Once I came up with the idea that it should be a love story just between two people, I thought that if it went in chronological order — if she sings a song and he sings a song — I thought that we would always sort of be ahead of them. You know, I didn't know quite where that was going to end up. And then it came to me on a subway platform that if she were going backwards and he were going forwards, that we'd know what the end of the story was, but we would always be a little bit struggling with them. You know, we would just be in the middle of their struggle to get together and to figure out what went wrong. And I thought that

⁴⁰ "Interview: Jason Robert Brown." The Dramatist. http://oldredhills.tripod.com/parade_dramatistjrb.html. (Accessed April 29, 2015).

psychologically made sense to me, that felt like what it was to be at the end of a marriage...⁴¹

Jamie sings “The Schmucl Song” at the couple’s second Christmas together. For Christmas, Jamie has written Cathy a story to go along with the watch he has bought for her. He titles it “The Story of Schmucl, Tailor of Klimovich.” As the story goes, an elderly tailor, Schmucl, has always dreamt of creating an incredibly beautiful dress, yet he has never had the time to make it. As he gets older, he fears that he will never accomplish his dream. The clock on the wall comes to life and tells Schmucl that he will “give him unlimited time” urging Schmucl to “sew and be happy.” Though Schmucl is reluctant he eventually begins to sew and astonishingly watches as time begins moving backwards. Schmucl travels back in time forty-one years where he gives the dress to the girl who ends up being his wife. Jamie says all this to encourage Cathie to seize the moment and unapologetically follow her dreams as an actress. At the end of the song he hands her the gift of time in the form of a watch.

Brown provides a distinct musical identity for Jamie, Schmucl, and the Clock. Schmucl’s music tends to have a Jewish or Russian flair, playing into Jamie’s roots as a Jewish writer, while the clock’s music consists of a modern pop rock sound. The song’s most memorable theme is sung by the clock’s character with the text “Na na na, na na na, Oh Schmucl you’ll get to be happy...na, na na na, na na na, I’ll give you unlimited time.” The piece is broken into three large sections each ending with the clock’s theme. Section one (mm.1-36) sets up the characters, while section two (mm.37-65) acts as a dialogue between the characters. Jamie dominates section three, the longest portion, as he ties the

⁴¹ Jason R. Brown, Interview by Jacki Lyden. *The Last Five Years Returns to New York*. (NPR, 10 Mar 2013)

first two sections together and figuratively becomes the clock character. Both the song and the entire musical are very time based, with the clock being a personification for both. Personification of the clock is an effective means of commenting on the finite nature of relationships while also justifying the staccato clock like rhythmic motive that underscores the majority of the eight-minute piece. The song is particularly challenging due to the length and complexity of its story. Audience members can easily lose interest or miss the main point.

Bad Bad News from *13 The Musical*

13 The Musical remains the only Broadway musical ever to have an entirely teenage cast and band. The story follows a young Jewish boy named Evan Goldman who has recently moved from New York City to small town Indiana in the midst of his parents' divorce. He struggles through the intricacies of middle school social life as he prepares for his Bar Mitzvah.

I had done some interview where I had said that what I wanted to do was write a musical about dancing teenagers. I had said it as a sort of flip comment. Dan (Elish) heard that and he wrote to me and said, "I want to write a musical about dancing teenagers, too, and I love your work." He sent me a copy of a book he had written called "Born Too Short" and he wrote me this funny letter. And I said, "Well, that's great. I'm not really sure I meant what I said about dancing teenagers, but now that I've got all this stuff, let me see what happens."⁴²

The song "Bad Bad News" is sung by Evan, Malcolm, Eddie, and Richie in reaction to their friend Brett's new relationship with Lucy. Lucy has been taking up all of Brett's time leaving no time for the guys, so they are forced to intervene.

⁴² Jason R. Brown Interview by Robert S. *A Brief Encounter With Jason Robert Brown*. Playbill, 3 Jan 2007. <http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/playbill.coms-brief-encounter-with-jason-robert-brown-137402>. (Accessed June, 1 2015).

Though the song is comically effective the music follows a simple rock/pop format. The chordal accompaniment written for electric guitar drives the song forward with an occasional interesting bass line to add a jazzy feel. The song is structured around a series of verses interspersed with chorus and a bridge section. Musically the most notable section happens at the end, as the boys sing a harmonically and rhythmically complex sequence as they repeatedly emphasize the word “bad” before finally landing on a jazzy D diminished-seven chord on the word “news.”

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