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THE EFFECT OF TEXT ON COMPOSITIONAL DECISIONS

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SUBMITTED WORKS

SCORES

Running at Still Life | for string quartet (2013)

Falling Up | for five players (2015)

as though birds | for orchestra (2013)

Sleep & Unremembrance | for orchestra (2016)

The Mysteries of Jacob | for narrator and clarinet (2014)

Three Pieces | for guitar and optional narrator (2014)

Beautiful School | for soprano and piano (2012/14)

Three Biographies | for countertenor and cello (2014)

RECORDINGS

CD

Track 1 | *Running at Still Life* | recorded live by the FLUX Quartet, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, St. Francis Auditorium, New Mexico Art Museum. July 26, 2013.

Track 2 | *Falling Up* | recorded live by Ensemble 360, Music in the Round. May 14, 2015.

Track 3 | *as though birds* | recorded live by the London Symphony Orchestra as part of the Panufnik Scheme Workshop, LSO St. Luke's. Conducted by François-Xavier Roth. February 7, 2014.

Track 4 | *Sleep & Unremembrance* | recorded live by the London Symphony Orchestra, Barbican Centre. Conducted by François-Xavier Roth. March 13, 2016.

Track 5 | *The Mysteries of Jacob* | recorded live by Sophie Wingland and Benjamin Mellefont, Explorensemble, The Royal College of Music. January 30, 2014.

Track 6 | *Three Biographies* | recorded live by Albert Montañez and Julius Tedaldi, Wigmore Hall. May 24, 2014.

DVD

Track 1 | *Three Pieces* | recorded live by Michael Poll, Matthew Robinson and Garrett Turner, Milton Court Theatre. April 26, 2014.

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ABSTRACT

The topic of this dissertation is the complex and varied relationship between words and music. Through the transference of the sonic and semantic properties and narrative capabilities of language to my music, I have discovered numerous ways of relating the meaning of the music to its design. This has resulted in a portfolio of pieces that incorporates text into vocal music, music with narration, and instrumental music.

Chapter 1 functions in two ways. The first main subchapter sets out a theoretical framework for my research field by showing how the similarities and differences between language and music can illuminate exploitable tensions. These ideas draw on the work of Charles Ives, Virginia Woolf, Klaas de Vries, and Morton Feldman. The second subchapter explains the relevance of different textual elements and their eventual outcomes in my music.

Chapter 2 provides commentary on eight pieces: *Running at Still Life*, *Falling Up*, *as though birds*, *Sleep & Unremembrance*, *The Mysteries of Jacob, Three Pieces for Guitar (To the Sea in a Sieve)*, *Beautiful School*, and *Three Biographies*. A description and analysis of each piece relates the musical material and compositional process to the overall topic of words and music.

Finally*,* **Chapter 3** draws conclusions based on the eight pieces and discusses possible methods of reclassifying the text/music relationship in light of these musical outcomes.

CHAPTER 1
FRAMING THE RESEARCH FIELD

1.1 SURROUNDING THEMES

1.1.1 WHY WORDS?

From the time I began composing, words have been integral to my music. I have written numerous pieces that incorporate text. These have included vocal pieces that set poetry and prose as well as instrumental pieces inspired by poems and poetic imagery. I have used inscriptions in public places and titles of works by artists in other disciplines and I have also written programmatic music. Text, in my work, has not only been the focus of specific pieces, but my process of sketching a composition has often involved generating long lists of words (in particular, adjectives such as "shiny," "prickly," "lonely," "ecstatic," "punchy," etc.) that help to achieve formal, textural, timbral, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic contrast. Thus, words have served, at least in part, as metaphors for my musical decisions.

In early 2012, I encountered an interview with Kaija Saariaho on the role of nature in her compositions. Her statement left me questioning the potential for a higher level of creative dimensionality in the relationships I intended to draw out between language and music.

> "Concerning my music and nature, the relation can be very complex and often is rarely, if ever, such that I would be inspired [by] some element of nature and then that I would try to describe it in my music. It's rather that it's some kind of starting point for the composition. And if we speak specifically about *Nymphéa*, there are different elements which I then use and transform in the compositional ideas, one of them being the very symmetrical form of the flower. Then there are different natural elements which break that symmetry. It can be wind and the flower will be deformed. Or it can be the water on which the flower is growing that is again making the flower move. So in fact, this became a metaphor […] an idea for how to transform certain musical material."[1]

[1] Kaija Saariaho, interview by Carnegie Hall, *On the Role of Nature in Her Work*, transc. by Elizabeth Ogonek, New York, February 17, 2012, accessed April 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEmSVqegTi4.

Saariaho's conceptual and physical engagement with nature led me to realize that the relationships between words and music that I perceived as connective tissue in my pieces were often arbitrary and superficial. The result was music that *intended* to substantively interact with its textual counterpart, but was only capable of complacent parallelism. For example, my piece for flute and piano, *Szymborska Poems* (2009), is based on three of Wislawa Szymborska's poems: "Greeting the Supersonics," "Under One Small Star" and "Miracle Fair." Though these poems provided poetic inspiration, the text did not inform any compositional decisions about the musical material. In effect, any number of other similar poems could have been the basis for this piece, rendering the connection between words and music one-dimensional.

The interrelationship of both media is undeniably a complex topic. For a researching composer, it is difficult to isolate an investigative field that could potentially yield new results. In this domain, new results are largely dependent on the individual text/music elements at play and the composer's creative ability to reinvent the nature of their interactions. It is for this reason that my doctoral portfolio explores different degrees of tension between words and music, allowing for informed and meaningful solutions to the problem of parallelism in my work while leaving room for unexpected outcomes. The basis of this practice-based research project stems from a personal need to examine how the transference of language – its meanings, sonic properties, and imagery – to my music can influence and even constitute its structural design and ultimately its interpretation.

1.1.2 CRITICAL ISSUES

Despite the beliefs of many that music is the purest art form – one that all others should aspire to[2] –music, in the absence of text, topoi, and quotation does not communicate anything concrete. In theory, poetry is capable of conveying an intended meaning while allowing the reader/listener interpretive latitude. Music, in contrast, lacks the capacity to concretely identify an idea that exists outside of itself, an image or an experience. As James Donelan summarizes:

> Poetry shares the medium of sound with music, yet does not suffer from the lack of explicit content that absolute music does. In other words, music is either hopelessly subjective (in the case of absolute music) or compromised by recourse to another art (poetry, in the form of lyrics, or an accompanying narrative description[.]) (Donelan 2008, 90-91)

Looming in the background of this project are critical issues that arise in discussion of music's susceptibility to "hopeless subjectivity."[3] First, the notion that music is meaningless without text assumes that the addition of text or accompanying narrative gives it meaning, although music might be content unto itself. True, music does not describe the size, shape, and color of a door as we objectively perceive it, but I would argue that composed music has the capacity to provoke the listener to construct his or her own meaning. Adorno states that "the identity of…musical concepts lies in their own existence and not in something to which they refer".[4] He maintains that music resides on a continuum between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. "Music aims at an intention-less language, but

---

[2] This is a paraphrase of Walter Pater's original assertion that "all art constantly aspires toward the condition of music." [Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. by Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 106.

[3] This is a reference to James Donelan's paraphrase of Hegel. [James H. Donelan, *Poetry and the Romantic Musical Aesthetic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91.]

[4] Theodor Adorno, "Music, Language, and Composition," in *Essays on Music*, trans. by Susan Gillespie, comm. By Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 114.

does not separate itself once and for all from signifying language[.]"[5] Adorno further explains that while music's intention is always obscured, it, nevertheless, conveys something specific.

Lawrence Kramer, on the other hand, claims that absolute music is rich with meaning. In disputing the notion that music's autonomy renders it meaningless, he points to specific hermeneutic practices: "The supposition that words become powerless in the face of the nonverbal is tantamount to a dismissal of both figurative language and illustrative narrative."[6] Furthermore, the

> flawed supposition, that music's nontextual character bars it from having text-like meaning, is based on a confusion between the medium and the message. The object of interpretation in classical hermeneutics is not the word or the sentence but the work[.] (Kramer 2001, 14)

Secondly, the argument that text reifies abstract musical ideas presupposes that words themselves have concrete meanings rather than abstract approximations. In a chapter on poetic language in *The Open Work*, Eco explains this idea:

> When I recite a line of poetry or an entire poem, the words I utter cannot be immediately translated into a fixed *denotatum* that exhausts their meaning, for they imply a series of meanings that expand at every new look, to the point that they seem to offer me a concentrated image of the entire universe. (Eco 1989, 25)

Though his assertion may be debatable, it elucidates a sonic and figurative understanding of words as they often appear in my music.

Finally, we have been conditioned to believe that subjectivity amounts to incommunicability. While the act of expressing one's understanding of an artistic experience is highly personal and, therefore, subjective, the abstraction that results is one that we have come to cherish in music – one that does not negate its communicative value. My piece, *The Mysteries of Jacob*, for narrator and clarinet, paints a portrait of a severely autistic boy struggling to communicate with those around him. In my understanding of the text and of

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[5] Adorno, 114.
[6] Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14.

Jacob's character, there is significant room for misunderstanding. The work, which is further explained in **chapter 2.3**, incorporates the narrated text into the music in three distinct ways: freely – fragments of text are grouped together by bar lines, but it is performed naturally and somewhat independently of the music; metrically – the text is rhythmically transcribed and highly integrated into the clarinet music; and also by various combinations of these two methods. This approach is intended to highlight the complexity of Jacob's character. However impenetrable the piece might be as a window into his world, the listener is bound to notice the different points at which text and music intersect. As Anthony Newcomb, in an article entitled "Sound and Feeling," asserts:

> expressiveness results from the metaphorical resonances or analogies that a viewer-listener-reader finds between properties that an object possesses and properties of experience outside the object itself. (Newcomb 1984, 625)

In this regard, some expressive understanding, however subjective, has been communicated.

1.1.3 UNITING WORDS AND MUSIC

A variety of artists have been influential in undertaking this research due either to their unusual approaches to the marriage of words and music, or because of the ways they critically engage or disengage with ideas in the previous subchapter. In each case, Charles Ives, Virginia Woolf, Klaas de Vries and Morton Feldman sought to broaden the manner in which they and their audience think about their respective media.

Charles Ives, in his analytical commentary *Essays Before a Sonata*, deliberates on the objective communicability of music, questioning whether or not music can express "the value of anything, material, moral, intellectual, or spiritual, which is usually expressed in terms other than music[.]"[7] Privately published in 1920 at the same time as the first edition

[7] Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1920), 3.

of the *Concord Sonata*,[8] these essays were intended to function as a cross-disciplinary companion to the music. Ives focused on literature as a means of transcending the materiality of his own art form because he was in search of a more ideal aesthetic. To validate the literary component, Ives used the preface to the *Essays* to convince his listeners and readers that music has the power to grapple with concepts normally addressed in poetry, novels or essays.

> Do all inspirational images, states, conditions, or whatever they may be truly called, have for a dominant part, if not for a source, some actual experience in life or of the social relation? To think that they do not – always at least – would be a relief; but as we are trying to consider music made and heard by human beings (and not by birds or angels) it seems difficult to suppose that even subconscious images can be separated from some human experience – there must be something behind subconsciousness to produce consciousness, and so on. (Ives 1920, 7-8)

Though J. Robert Browning argues that "[t]he very existence of these writings as essay-programs meant to be read *before* one listens to the *Concord Sonata* argues that music can be involved in complex, conceptual texts[,]"[9] Ives himself writes just before the prologue, "The following pages were written primarily as a preface or a reason for the [writer's] second Pianoforte Sonata – "Concord, Mass., 1845."[10]

Eleven years after Ives' *Essays* first appeared, Virginia Woolf published her novel *The Waves*.[11] While it is well known that she was passionate about the late Beethoven sonatas and quartets,[12] her interest in music ran deeper than mere inspiration, fueling her pursuit to

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[8] Ives prepared a second, revised edition of the *Sonata* between 1940-47 which was subsequently published by Arrow Music Press (Associated Music Publishers, Inc.) in 1947. [Charles Ives, *Piano Sonata No. 2: "Concord Mass., 1840-1860* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, Inc., 1947).] In 2012, Stephen Drury published a version of the *Sonata* which includes the *Essays*. [Charles Ives, *Piano Sonata No. 20, "Concord," with the Essays Before a Sonata* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012).]
[9] J. Robert Browning, "My God, What Has Sound Got to Do with Music?," in *T.S. Eliot's Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music*, ed. by John Xiros Cooper (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 200.
[10] Ives, *Essays*, 1.
[11] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000 ed.).
[12] Elicia Clements notes that Woolf made several comments about Beethoven in her diary. Clements also points to several critics who have examined the influence that Beethoven's later music may have had on her writing. [Elicia Clements, "Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf's 'The Waves,'" *Narrative* 13, no. 2 (2005), 161-163.

uncover a symbiotic connection between music and language. Woolf thought of her writing in musical terms because "there was such a mass of detail that the only way [she] could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes[.]"[13] She further says of *The Waves* that she was "writing to a rhythm and not to a plot[.]"[14] In her article on how Beethoven Op. 130 and the *Grosse Fuge*, Op. 133 were formative in Woolf's conception of *The Waves*, Elicia Clements says: "her use of music as a concept and later as a methodological principle is highly innovative by comparison to her contemporaries because it does not presuppose a dichotomy between form and content."[15]

Woolf describes her novel as a set of dramatic soliloquies. It outlines six characters' lives, alluding to a seventh (Percival) only in conversation and in recollected memories and experiences. Each of the novel's episodes is bookended by interludes that depict in detail the state of the waves throughout the day. Clements maintains that "the six subjectivities become the structure: "character" and form are indivisible."[16] The unity of musical material and formal design is one that I explore in my two orchestra pieces, *as though birds* (**chapter 2.2**) and *Sleep & Unremembrance* (**chapter 2.4**).

Dutch composer Klaas de Vries sought to "return" *The Waves* to a musical idiom in his 1998 electroacoustic opera, *A King, Riding*. In the CD's liner notes, he comments that Woolf was "frustrated with the fact that she was unable to allow the characters to actually appear and speak simultaneously – impossible, by definition, in literature, but perfectly

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[13] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 6., ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich, Publishers, 1986), 426.
[14] Ibid., vol. 4, 204.
[15] Clements, 161.
[16] Ibid., 166.

feasible in….[music] theatre."[17] Though de Vries' original idea of combining several commissions for solo pieces into one single work featuring dramatic musical monologues had nothing to do with *The Waves*, Woolf's sonic sensitivity toward language, the counterpoint of the episodes and interludes, and the thematic transference that occurs between characters (or instruments) provided him with a rich musical palette.

Drawing on the novel's material, the six characters (or singers) are each accompanied by an instrument with Percival manifesting only as a solo instrument. The instrumental aspect of these characters is intended to both elucidate the notion of multiple identities and draw attention to the idea of all characters being one.

> And because [*A King, Riding*] was conceived in the first place as a piece of music, the form is much more distinct. The characters' solidarity, the fact that together they form a single organism also becomes much clearer. (de Vries quoted by Zuidam, 2004, liner notes to *A King, Riding*)

For Woolf, the characters of *The Waves* created the content, which in turn, dictated the form of the novel. In a way, the opposite was true for de Vries: the book's content aligned with his initial idea of the music's design, leading to the characters' musical existence. The end results for both Woolf and de Vries are, however, similar. The composer explains:

> Only after it dawned on me that the structure of the music had to be identical to that of the story did I comprehend the ultimate consequence of my search: the novel begins with a description of the sea before sunrise, in a state of semi-darkness where the sea and the sky are indistinguishable. The way in which the day begins out of nothing made me realize where the actual beginning of the composition lay: at the rustle of the audience as it enters the theatre and the warming up of the orchestra. (de Vries quoted by Zuidam, 2004, liner notes to *A King, Riding*)

In comparison to Ives, Woolf, and de Vries, Feldman's *Neither* (as the self-referential title suggests) confronts the unity of both words and music. Commissioned by the Rome Opera and premiered in 1977, it incorporates text by Samuel Beckett that was conceived

[17] Klaas de Vries quoted by Rob Zuidam, liner notes to de Vries, *A King, Riding*, Asko Schoenberg Ensemble and Reinbert de Leeuw. Composers' Voice B000222YEQ, CD, 2004.

under unusual collaborative circumstances. Of a well-documented meeting of the composer and writer in Berlin, Feldman reports:

> there was no compromise because we were in complete agreement about many, many things. For example – he was very embarrassed – he said to me, after a while, "Mr. Feldman, I don't like opera." I said to him, "I don't blame you!" (Feldman quoted by Skempton 1977, 5)

Furthermore, Beckett did not like having his texts set to music, and Feldman did not like setting texts. The composer explains that he was in search of "something that just hovered."[18]

Feldman began writing the music before receiving Beckett's text. As a result, the piece, which defies the traditional conventions of opera, takes an unusual approach to text setting, drama, and the integration of words and music. The vocal part, which is characterized by bleak stasis and repetition, is confined to an uncomfortably high tessitura. Feldman disguises the natural rhythms of Beckett's text in numerous ways. He often de-emphasizes the stress of words by setting syllables of differing lengths to even rhythmic durations. Furthermore, polysyllabic words are often not precisely notated with corresponding rhythms, leaving such decisions to the singer. In other moments (e.g. between rehearsals 15 and 16 when the voice first enters), Feldman sets several consecutive words on the same pitch which seems to obliterate the intonational nuances of specific words.

Drama is not explicitly achieved through the text but in an unfurling of musical states. The stanzas of the poem are often separated by long, suspended stretches of orchestral music. "It's almost as if I'm reflecting[,]" Feldman says of one interlude. "I didn't want a cause-and-effect continuity, a kind of glue that would take me from one thought to another. I wanted to treat each sentence as a world."[19] As such, it seems that Feldman shared

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[18] Feldman quoted by Howard Skempton, "Beckett as Librettist," *Music and Musicians* 25 no. 9 (1977), 5.
[19] Skempton, 6.

with Beckett a vision of an abstract interpretation of consciousness – a rendering of the deeply fractured, existential "self." For him, this understanding of consciousness as drifting between "what the 'self' is" and the "unself"[20] was a personal reflection on his own practice.[21]

As a critique of operatic norms, or simply a matter of aesthetic preference, text and music exist in *Neither* as strange, symbiotic companions. In the liner notes to a recording released in 2011, Art Lang asserts:

> The music does not attempt to accompany or depict the text in the usual fashion; instead Feldman has created a kind of musical equivalent to the environment that the words suggest, invoking the same atmosphere and sharing a similar vision.[22]

Neither art form relinquishes its identity in pursuit of the other. Instead, they travel together toward an "unspeakable home."

While the works by Ives, Woolf, de Vries, and Feldman explore varying degrees of unity between music and language in common, each differently balances the level of tension that exists between the two. Their collective intention is a more perfect union or a more absolute art form that is capable of engendering rather than representing the authentic experience of human emotion. The work that I am undertaking for this doctorate does not aim to minimize the friction that exists between words and music in order to create what Ives referred to as a transcendent language.[23] My portfolio centers specifically on varied processes used to manipulate different degrees of tension between words and music.

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[20] Skempton, 6.
[21] Feldman discusses how the development of his personal aesthetic is a deconstruction of the "self" and a reconstruction of the unself: "a very detached, impersonal, perfect type of machinery." Ibid.
[22] Art Lang, liner notes to Morton Feldman, *Neither*, RSO-Frankfurt, Sarah Leonard and Zoltán Peskó, Hat Art hatn180, CD, 2011.
[23] Ives, *Essays*, 10.

1.2 CONCEPTUAL PROCESS

1.2.1 GOALS

This brief examination of various vocal and instrumental works has illuminated the myriad roles that words, poetry, and narrative can play in the conception and outcome of a piece. I intend to discover the possibilities that arise in my music when linguistic,[24] structural (form, process) and poetic (imagery, mood, tone) design influence compositional decisions. These decisions include orchestration, form (structure), harmony, melody, rhythm, texture and timbre, mood, character, affect, and process. My project diverges from the work of other composers in two respects: it is the focal point for a body of eight successive compositions, and it is a multifaceted investigation of how language informs my compositions. Central to my project are three objectives:

- examining the different musical structures that arise from text
- developing compositional processes that treat words or bodies of text as generators of musical material
- establishing controlled environments in which the text and music interact, allowing the unique properties of the resulting relationships to emerge

1.2.2 EXAMINING THE MINUTIAE OF LANGUAGE: WORDS

On a primary level my creative research deals with words as individual entities outside of a semantic context in order to isolate potential areas for musical engagement. If one were to map the basic properties of words on a continuum **(figure 1)**, it might look like this:

[24] It must be noted that this thesis deals exclusively with the sonic properties and meanings of words. Syntax is **not** addressed in my work.

Figure 1 | properties of words on a continuum

sonic properties→ (figurative meaning)→ literal meaning

Words as Sonic Objects

On the left-hand side of **figure 1** are the acoustic properties of words, including words that emphasize either lyrical or rhythmic qualities such as "tousling" and "languid" or "maniacal" and "fidget." Other words might have dramatic internal shifts like "horizontal" and "vicissitude" or internal rhyme like "voodoo." Subtle changes of consonantal or vowelled sounds found in words such as "clasped" or "eunoia" play a part as well. I am also interested in the speech rhythms that characterize specific words. While pitch contour possesses musical significance, the way that words are intoned or emphasized can also greatly alter their sonic profile.

Meanings of Words

On the right-hand side of **figure 1** is literal meaning, the basic concrete value of words. In a musical context, this is rendered as "overt representation."[25] In the middle of the continuum is figurative meaning, an altering or an exaggeration of the literal or conventional meanings of words that emphasizes their metaphorical, paradoxical, oxymoronic and onomatopoeic properties. In displacing their literal meanings – of course, onomatopoeic words may not have a literal meaning – a kind of "covert representation"[26] is achieved. As gray as this area might be, the counterpoint of literal and figurative meanings provides an interesting framework within which the composer can work.

[25] Kramer, 14.
[26] Ibid.

By isolating the properties of words in this way, I do not mean that I write word pieces. I intend to explore the interesting and relevant musical structures that can be gleaned from an engagement with the elemental foundations of words. Perhaps the consonantal or vowelled shifts that I referred to earlier can provide the roadmap for localized timbral change, or on a larger scale, structural change. Furthermore, the interplay between the sonic properties of words and their literal and figurative meanings could have unusual musical consequences. In some cases, one strand of musical material might deal directly with the sound of a word while another might portray a fluid change between the literal and figurative, theoretically establishing a sense of multi-layered meaning. As exemplified by Ligeti in *Nouvelles Aventures*,[27] a piece that unites different consonants and vowels with rapidly changing emotional states, the sound world that results can be both jarring and rich. The multitude of possibilities that becomes available opens up a wide field for creative exploration.

1.2.3 INTERPRETING AND APPLYING ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE

Context most certainly changes the fundamental value of words. They carry different weights depending on how they are organized syntactically, semantically or sonically. The next level of my investigation assumes a context. Because much of my work is highly dramatic, narrative necessarily plays a substantial role in this project.

Drawing on the structuralist approach derived from Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*,[28] cultural and literary theorist, Tzvetan Todorov, defines literary narrative in the following way:

[27] György Ligeti, *Nouvelles Aventures* (Frankfurt: Edition Peters, 1965).
[28] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. by Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

> An ideal narrative begins with a stable situation that some force will perturb. From which results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in a converse direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is quite similar to the first, but the two are not identical. (Todorov 1981, 51)

His theory of literary narrative provides a useful analytical tool to rationalize the significance of musical events or to clarify unexpected deviations in tonal music. In his article "On Narrativity in Music: Expressive Genres and Levels of Discourse in Beethoven," Robert Hatten develops the idea that narrative can "explain events and formal departures that might appear incompletely motivated from a purely formalist perspective."[29] Several issues arise, however, in the effort to analyze music in terms of narrative. The question of how plot, agency, representation, temporality, and causality figure into a musical context is one that has preoccupied many musicologists. Michael L. Klein points out that much debate exists around the topic of what musical narrative actually does. He notes that we

> accept multiple views of musical narrative as an unfolding of affective states (Tarasti, Maus, Klein), or the tracking of hierarchical relationships (Almén, Grabócz, Tarasti), or the response to music's unruly surface (McDonald, Klein), or simply as an intentional act of perception (Maus, Reyland). Further, we never invoke narrative simply to resuscitate a lost and enchanted form of structuralism (Kramer, McClary), except when we do (Meelberg, Grabócz, Almén). (Klein 2013, 3-4)

The problem still persists that narrative, as a method for understanding music, is only applicable to the hierarchical organization of tonality. This presents challenges for the 21st century composer wishing not only to understand music in terms of narrative but also to incorporate it into a creative practice. Klein's essay, "Musical Story: A Story About Discourse,"[30] argues for what he calls a "map of narrative discourse"[31] which can potentially

[29] Robert Hatten, "On Narrativity in Music: Expressive Genres and Levels of Discourse in Beethoven." *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991): 75.
[30] Michael L. Klein, "Musical Story: A Story About Discourse," in *Music and Narrative Since 1900*, ed. by Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
[31] Ibid., 4.

encompass the plurality of music since 1900. In his structure, narrative leads to non-narrative while neo-narrative leads to anti-narrative. My summary of his points is as follows:

- **Narrative**: "music that largely accepts the tonal, topical and thematic premises of the nineteenth century, including moments of thematic transformation, crisis and catastrophe, transcendence and apotheosis."

- **Non-narrative**: "music with no tonality, no themes, no sense of causality or transformation, no organizing principle whatsoever[.]"

- **Neo-narrative**: "music in search of new ways to tell stories." He goes on to explain that this can include melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, textural/timbral, and gestural transformations.

- **Anti-narrative**: "music that serves as the critique of nineteenth-century narrative discourse…composers take on the conventions of musical narrative discourse in order to deny our expectations for their continuation."

(all Klein quotations 2013, 4-6)

Klein suggest that if one were to plot these points into a contingent, grid-like structure, many pieces might either belong to more than one category,[32] or they might fit somewhere on a continuum.

As "narrative" (broadly speaking) applies equally to pieces of absolute music and texted music in this project, I have found this idea quite useful. Vocal music that attempts to subordinate a text does not necessarily fall off the map by virtue of its setting being "un-narrative." Similarly, absolute music (or "programmatic" music) has creative license to discursively engage with an accompanying text. Klein's idea furthermore justifies for the composer a sense of freedom and flexibility both aesthetically and in the choices he or she might make about what musical material is to undergo narrative transformation. Many of the

[32] Klein, 6.

pieces in my portfolio examine the fluency of narrative discourse by emphasizing one or more of the following components:

- **Conflict and Resolution**: "order versus transgression"[33]
- **Time**: sequential time, non-linear time
- **Pace**: the rate at which dramatic events are revealed
- **Perception and Subtext**: what is perceived by the listener, what is implicit in the music, in the text or both

Further discussion of how these elements are consequential for my pieces will follow in the musical commentary.

1.2.4 CONSTRUCTING TENSIONS

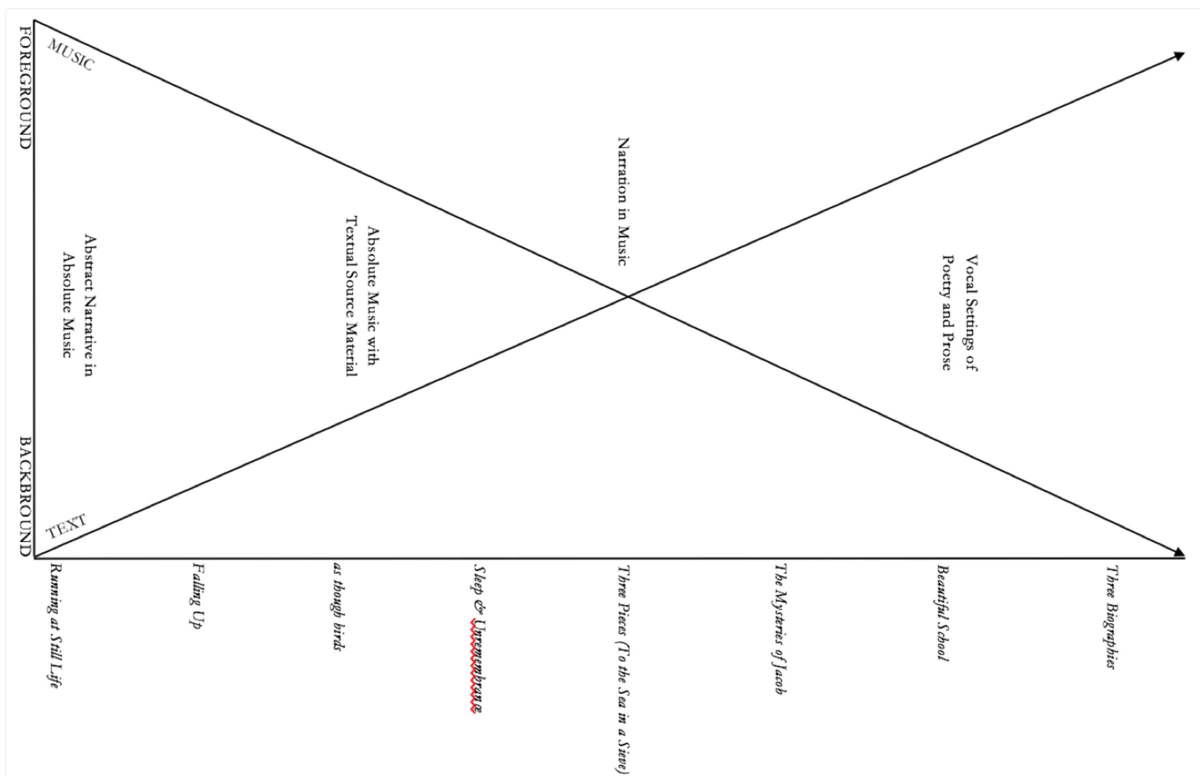
In the previous two subchapters, I have laid out the various text-based elements that come into play. In this subchapter, I will attempt to demonstrate the different degrees to which text and music are at odds with one another. This doctorate is broadly about the tension of subjective musical decision-making as it applies to text. However, many different levels of tension exist in the relationship *between* text and music. Tension in this work can further be classified by how present the text and its meaning are in relation to the music for the listener. While the employment of different text related techniques in this dissertation might seem arbitrary, it operates according to a continuum that explores interdependence between text and music (**figure 2**). One tangible outcome of this process involved designing a series of pieces that gradually brings text into the listener/observer's foreground. Beginning with the structure of a narrative (but not the narrative itself), text becomes increasingly apparent either by various applications to music or by varying levels of

[33] Byron Almén, "Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 12.

audibility. Traditional forms of song where the music is treated as subsidiary to the text are at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Chapter 2 is organized so as to highlight this progression. Each consecutive pair of commentaries can be further classified according to instrumentation (i.e. quartet/quintet (R*unning at Still Life/Falling Up*), orchestral music (*as though birds/Sleep & Unremembrance*), narrator and solo instrument (*Three Pieces/The Mysteries of Jacob*), singer and instrument (*Beautiful School/Three Biographies*)). Although this was unplanned, the parallels provided an extraordinary opportunity to investigate a wide range of possibilities within each given subgenre.

Figure 2 | continuum of text/music relationships



CHAPTER 2
MUSICAL COMMENTARY

2.1 RUNNING AT STILL LIFE
for string quartet

2.1.1 NARRATIVE PARAMETERS

The use of narrative structure as a mechanism for creating pieces of absolute music is a common device used by composers. As exemplified by Lutoslawski's *Livre pour orchestre*,[34] the composer believes that (large scale) musical forms "should be composed of some musical events – that one after another – may be compared to an action, to a plot of a drama, or a novel, or a short story[.]"[35] Commissioned by the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, my *Running at Still Life* began as an attempt to construct a narrative without a guiding text. I set out to determine the parameters needed to delineate musical narrative if there was no perceivable program. The music was not to represent images or events resembling words, but to suggest a narrative undercurrent.

Central to narrative in this piece is tension. Ives' *String Quartet No. 2*, which hinges on the second movement, "Arguments," explores this idea. In the composer's own words, the program of the piece refers to "four men – who converse, discuss, argue…fight, shake hands, shut up – then walk up the mountainside to view the firmament."[36] The process of determining the musical components that were to be in conflict throughout *Running at Still Life* revealed two problems: 1) it became clear that a listener could only recognize what the narrative elements were when they were in conflict and 2) these elements, therefore, needed

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[34] Witold Lutoslawski, *Livre pour orchestra* (London: Chester Music, 1969).
[35] Quotation taken from Douglas Rust, 'Conversation with Witold Lutoslawski' by Nicholas Reyland, "Livre or Symphony? Lutoslawski's *Livre pour Orchestre* and the Enigma of Musical Narrativity," *Music Analysis* 27/ii-iii (2008): 254.
[36] Charles Ives, *String Quartet No. 2* (New York: Peer International Corp., 1954).

to have a strong enough profile to engender expectation from the listener. Consequently, this piece examines stark contrast and opposition. Tension exists on a large scale between dissonance and consonance. This manifests motivically (the major second versus the unison), harmonically (angular chromaticism versus tonality), and gesturally (violence versus placidity).

2.1.2 MOTIVE, HARMONY, GESTURE

Throughout the piece, the major second motive is characterized by instability. This is heard early on as the second violin and cello repeatedly slide downward and upward by half step to avoid the stasis of pitches A and B. The quartet also vacillates between the major and minor second from mm. 55-65, never settling on one interval over the other. Inspired by Ives, motivic instability goes beyond pitch to encompass the stratification of the ensemble. Beginning in m. 16, the quartet is divided into two parts that converge on a rhythmic unison at letter B. The tension of two versus one is clearly suggested by the dichotomy between first violin/viola (melody) and second violin/cello (harmony). A similar tactic is used at letter F with the two violins sustaining the harmony while the viola and cello play a delicate and impulsive melody. The two elements come together for a brief second in m. 86 before parting ways again.

Harmonically, conflict is observed through the overlap, integration and interruption of dissonant and consonant music. The chromatic clusters of letter B intrude upon the music that precedes them, a similar situation occurring in m. 40. Another example can be seen in mm. 115-118 when the entrance of *f* chords abruptly halts the suspended D major 7/D minor melodic material **(example 1)**.

Example 1 | dissonant harmonic interruption, mm. 115-118

These two examples illustrate the use of dissonant music as an impediment to consonant music, but the opposite is true too. While the music beginning at letter I may not in any way be densely chromatic, the insertion of triads **(example 2)** in mm. 137 and 139 undermines a sense of harmonic stability. This is further reinforced by the dynamics, articulations, and consistency of the rhythmic material. Though I was unsuccessful, I had attempted to challenge the dissonance of the interlocking major and minor seconds in this section with a quasi-A Phrygian ostinato (beginning at letter K). Unfortunately, the arrival of letter K is too strong for it to be considered an interruption.

Example 2 | consonant harmonic interruption, mm. 136-139

The third point of contention arises gesturally. The violence of the thirty-second notes at letter B returns as *fp* trills at letter E. This gesture later devolves into a quiet pattering. The disparity of dynamic levels associated with this rhythmic gesture is further exploited as the soft, high, arpeggiated chords at letter O descend into loud micropolyphony.

Descent or falling is another key gesture in *Running at Still Life*. It does function at moments as a motivic device. For example, the piece's opening downward glissando is later developed into an entire section that, beginning at letter D, gradually moves downward. The arrivals of the lowest moments are often countered by music existing in a higher tessitura or music that moves in the opposite direction. For example, the descending glissando in m. 2 is followed by an ascending glissando in m. 7.

On a broader scale, tension exists between motive, harmony and gesture, perpetuating parametrical conflict. Harmonic stability at letter F is offset by rhythmic fragility that results from an alternation of 4/8 and 7/16. This was originally composed as a succession of even 4/8 bars. Unisons, or the resolution of the major second, are always interpreted ferociously, similar to the thirty-second notes at m. 22. Furthermore, the major second, representing a motivic tension, defines moments of formal repose.

In the end, the resolution of these tensions had little to do with a winning out of one element over another. Of more importance was subverting the listeners' expectations by composing music that took off in unexpected directions. Though the unison seemingly triumphs over the major second in *Running at Still Life*, the final violin gesture attempts to free the piece from an obligation to resolve those tensions that pervade the music.

2.1.3 CONCLUSIONS

Running at Still Life is a precarious and somewhat naïve example of the narrative capabilities of music. The quartet strove to *be* an entire narrative from beginning to end by

translating the rudimentary tenets of a narrative structure (i.e. setup, conflict, resolution) into musical terms in the absence of a text. In retrospect, there were numerous issues with this approach, the greatest of which was a vast misunderstanding of how causality functions in a narrative framework. According to E.M. Forster, the relationship of cause and effect is what distinguishes a story from a plot. He states that a story is "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence[,]"[37] whereas, "[a] plot is also a narrative of events, [but] the emphasis [falls] on causality[.]"[38] In other words, a plot is defined by the causal actions that create coherent, logical connections between a primary and a secondary event.

The piece fell short of acknowledging the necessity of a cause and effect relationship because it was built entirely of nine, small, unreturning episodes. By E.M. Forster's definition, the piece was essentially a "story" made up of nine major events. The thread between these episodes was the motivic relationship between the second (minor and major) and the unison. Though this relationship provided consistency throughout the work, its aim of representing tension and resolution was obscured by sudden and frequent departures to new musical ideas. Consequently, the interval of a second was not always perceived as a tension because the relationship between the second and the unison was always in a state of redefinition. Cause and effect, and therefore a narrative plot was absent. These shortcomings set the stage for a more comprehensive examination of this topic through various forms of narrative deconstruction.

[37] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 41.
[38] Ibid.

2.2 FALLING UP

for five players

2.2.1 BACKGROUND/DESCRIPTION OF GOALS

As a winner of the 2014 Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize, *Falling Up* for five players was commissioned for members of Ensemble 360 and Music in the Round. The premiere was scheduled during their annual May Festival, which focused in 2015 on youth. Rather than writing music for children I chose to write a piece that would look back on the complexity of childhood memories from an older person's point of view. It is no coincidence that *Falling Up* shares the same vantage point and poetic impulse as my orchestral work, *Sleep & Unremembrance*, since they were written concurrently. However, an even closer comparison can be made to *Running at Still Life*.

Written two years later, *Falling Up* functions exclusively as one part of a narrative structure.[39] More specifically, the piece *is* the tension between two equilibriums or the series of actions that make a second event probable as the result of a first event. *Falling Up* operates according to two narrative continuums. The first imagines that different structural points in a narrative (discussed in the footnote below) can be frozen or storyboarded and placed across different media. That means that the first event (setup/exposition), childhood, is represented by Part IV of Arthur Rimbaud's poem "Enfance" from his collection *Illuminations*. The conflict (middle/rising action, climax, falling action), aging or the loss of precious memories, takes place in my piece, and the second event (resolution/*denoument*),

[39] If one were to consider Aristotle's definition of plot, which proposes that it must have a beginning middle and end, which causally relate to one another, this piece would represent only the middle section. [Aristotle, "Section 1, Chapter 7," in *Poetics*, trans. by S. H. Butcher, last modified 2009, accessed July 21, 2015, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html.] If one were to further consider Gustav Freytag's definition, which suggests an expanded five-part structure consisting of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and *denoument*, this piece would present the rising action, climax and falling action. [Gustav Freytag, "Chapter 2: The Construction of the Drama," in *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, trans. by Elias J. MacEwan (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2008), 114-140.]

adulthood, parallels Shel Silverstein's poem "Falling Up" from his collection of the same name. While it may seem counterintuitive that the childish tone of Silverstein's poem equates to an aged mentality, the narrative as a whole addresses the notion that the complexity of childhood is rarely remembered that way – that childishness is essentially an invention of the adult mind. From this arises the second continuum, which places emphasis on the capacity of the music as a vehicle by which the observer travels from Rimbaud's state of mind to Silverstein's. Seen below are both poems:

> ENFANCE: PART IV
>
> I am the saint, at prayer on the terrace, – as meek animals graze all the way to the sea of Palestine.
> I am the learned scholar in the dark armchair. Branches and the rain hurl themselves at the library's casement window.
> I am the walker on the great highway through dwarf woods; the murmur of sluices muffles my steps. I gaze for a long time at the melancholy gold laundry of the setting sun.
> I'd gladly be the abandoned child on the pier setting out for the open sea, the young farm boy in the lane, whose forehead grazes the sky.
> The paths are harsh. The little hills are cloaked with broom. The air is motionless. How far away the birds and the springs are! It can only be the end of the world, as you move forward. (Rimbaud trans. by Ashbury 2011, 27/29)

> FALLING UP
>
> I tripped on my shoelace
> And I fell up –
> Up to the roof tops,
> Up over the town,
> Up past the tree tops,
> Up over the mountains,
> Up where the colors
> Blend into the sounds.
> But it got me so dizzy
> When I looked around,
> I got sick to my stomach
> And I threw down. (Silverstein 1996, 7)

2.2.2 DIFFERENT STATES OF BEING

The decision to juxtapose Part IV of Rimbaud's "Enfance" with Silverstein's "Falling Up" recalls Rimbaud's life-long preoccupation with different states of being. In an infamous letter to his friend Paul Demeny in 1871, the sixteen-year old Rimbaud wrote, "I say that one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious disordering of the senses."[40]

Rimbaud's exploration of identity can be analyzed as five roles: the rebel, the voyager, the lover, the poet, and the child. These different characterizations of the self tend to collide in his poetry. In Part IV of "Enfance," the narrator identifies simultaneously as "the saint," "the learned scholar," "the walker" and "the abandoned child." Enid Rhodes Peshel, in *Flux and Reflux: Ambivalence in the Poetry of Arthur Rimbaud*, suggests that his self-characterization of the child is the most intriguing because, unlike the others, it is subjected to little transformation.[41] In contrast, childhood is often portrayed as a volatile oscillation between opposing emotions. An example is seen in Part I of "Enfance" in which Rimbaud mentions "[m]agical flowers [that] were humming."[42] Following shortly after, "[s]torm clouds were piling up on the rising sea made of an eternity of hot tears."[43] This counterpoint of emotions closely resembles Ligeti's vocal experiments in *Aventures*[44] and *Nouvelles Aventures.*[45] As the composer explains,

> I put together a kind of 'scenario' by joining five areas of emotions; humour, ghostly-horror, sentimental, mystical-funereal and erotic. All five areas or processes are present, all through the music, and they switch from one to the other so abruptly and

[40] Arthur Rimbaud quoted by Melissa Kwasny, *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 147.
[41] Enid Rhodes Peschel, *Flux and Reflux: Ambivalence in the Poetry of Arthur Rimbaud* (Paris: Librairie Drox, 1977), 128.
[42] Arthur Rimbaud, "Enfance: Part I" in *Illuminations*, trans. by John Ashbury (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011), 27.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Györgi Ligeti, *Aventures* (Frankurt: Edition Peters, 1962).
[45] Ligeti, *Nouvelles Avenutures*.

> quickly that there is a virtual simultaneity. Each of the three singers plays five roles at the same time. *Aventures* is a very complex piece. It is based on a kind of script which defines the succession – also the simultaneity – of the different emotional situations. (Ligeti trans. by Schabert 1983, 45)

Falling Up, like *Running at Still Life*, relies on an episodic structuring of the piece's musical material. In contrast to the quartet, however, only two main ideas dominate the piece, resulting in musical evolution through alternation. **Example 3a** illustrates the first thematic idea, which can be seen in mm. 1-13 while **example 3b** illustrates the second, seen in mm. 14-19. When compared, the following differences become apparent: tempo (q = 42/q = 72), rhythmic values (long/short), articulation (slurs, tenuto marks /staccatos, accents), character (lyrical/gestural), length (thirteen measures/five measures) and range (A3-B4/Bb3-Db7). The reduction of these themes makes the first idea's monophonic qualities and the second idea's polyphonic qualities clear.

Sharp juxtapositions of character are not only observed between the two principal themes but also in subsequent iterations of both. The return of the first theme (m. 20), is noticeably more florid: each instrument possesses greater independence, the pitch range is expanded and the phrasal structure is more continuous. Similarly, the third iteration of the second theme, beginning at letter H (m. 57), attempts to reassemble the fragmented musical material of the first version. This is achieved by a more homogenous treatment of the ensemble whereby it is divided according to instrumental families (winds/strings). Priority is given to a predominantly homophonic texture, and more emphasis is placed on collective rests rather than individual rests. This shifts the emotional quality of the second theme from manic to aggressive.

Example 3a | first theme

Free and expressive, ♩ = ca. 42

Example 3b | second theme

Suddenly wild! ♩ = ca. 72

Difficulties arose when I attempted to strike a balance between stasis and transformation. Conceptually, it was important to reference the Rimbaudian idea that one's perception of childhood has the potential to remain essentially the same since child-like emotions manifest well into adulthood. Hence, the choice to think of Silverstein's "Falling

Up" as the ultimate arrival point. In order for that to be plausible, however, one must gradually unlearn adult experiences as they are acquired. Therefore, a process of regressive transformation is necessary. This challenge was approached by composing a series of variations on each of the two themes that altered various musical parameters with the start of each new variation. **Table 1** shows the order in which the variations associated with the first theme were composed while **table 2** does the same for those variations associated with the second theme. Included is a brief description of exactly which musical parameters change and how each variation builds upon the previous one.

Table 1 | first theme and variations

CLASSIFICATION	MEASURE NUMBERS	ALTERED PARAMETERS
Theme 1	1-13	n/a
Variation 1	78-88	harmony, instrumentation
Variation 2	43-56	range, length, fluid rhythms
Variation 3	20-30	independent lines, longer phrase structures

Table 2 | second theme and variations

CLASSIFICATION	MEASURE NUMBERS	ALTERED PARAMETERS
Theme 2	14-19	n/a
Variation 1	31-42	new pitches, progression toward steadier rhythms
Variation 2	57-65	counterpoint between instrumental families, homophony, emphasis on the linear

From the tables above it is evident that the first theme becomes more ornate with individual lines acquiring independence, while the second theme simplifies. This ordering of material, however, is not necessarily how it appears in the final version of the piece. Equally important to the underlying concept was stasis, which is paradoxically achieved by means of volatility or dramatic shifts between dissimilar ideas. Musically, this is the result of

disarranging and interlacing the two original variation sequences, so that any trace of evolutionary or devolutionary logic is obscured. Consequently, the piece strives to evoke a splintered, manic-depressive state of mind. Shown below is **table 3,** which illustrates the definitive arrangement of the piece's variations as they are presented in the score.

Table 3 | final ordering of first and second themes/variations

CLASSIFICATION	MEASURE NUMBERS
Theme 1	1-13
Theme 2	14-19
Theme 1, Variation 3	20-30
Theme 2, Variation 1	31-42
Theme 1, Variation 2	43-56
Theme 2, Variation 2	57-65
Theme 1, Variation 1	78-88

2.2.3 CONTINUITY

While *Falling Up* explores disjunctive ideas and scattered identities, I have assumed that a single self often dictates multiple selves. Emphasis is placed, therefore, on any musical parameter capable of facilitating continuity while still accommodating change. Like many iconic musical structures including sonata form and larger symphonic forms in which disparate, seemingly unrelated themes and movements are linked by hierarchical pitch relationships,[46] the two contrasting themes in *Falling Up* rely upon permutations of a single melodic idea for their connective tissue.

Ave Maris Stella, a Marian plainchant hymn made popular during the Middle Ages and used widely by several generations of composers – Josquin, Palestrina, Dufay, Monteverdi, Dvorak, Liszt and Peter Maxwell Davies among other – serves as the basis for the pitch material in this piece. A transcription of the chant can be seen in **example 4**. Of the two themes in *Falling Up*, the primary theme most explicitly resembles the original hymn.

[46] Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York: W. W Norton & Company, 1980), 5.

Noticeable differences include a rhythmicization of the chant, altered accidentals, harmony, and internal troping. Similarities include the use of a parallel starting mode, melodic contour and phrase structure. In **example 5**, I have made an analysis that compares the hymn to my melody.

Example 4 | *Ave Maris Stella*

A - ve ma - ris stel - la, De - i ma - ter al - ma

at - que sem - per vir - go, fe - lix cae - li por - ta.

The secondary theme derives its pitch material from permutated versions of the chant. To generate this sequence of pitches, the original thirty-seven-note melody was transposed up a minor third to F (hereafter referred to as T3) and down a minor second to C# (or Db). Only the retrograde version of the Db transposition is used throughout this theme so I will hereafter refer to it as R11. The flute, clarinet and cor anglais parts are built from a free alternation between T3 and R11. I have located the instrumental pitches within the two transposed versions of the chant (**examples 6a-b)**. This theme inhabits its own distinctly dissonant sound world, yet it arises from the same modal origin as the first theme.

Example 5 | comparative analysis of hymn and first theme

Example 6a | comparative analysis of hymn and second theme (flute)

T3

Flute

R11

Example 6b | comparative analysis of hymn and second theme (clarinet)

T3

Clarinet

R11

While the two main themes are manipulations of the chant melody, the pitches and rhythms of all subsequent variations were freely composed. Proportionally, the various episodes follow a scheme – with intermittent deviations – dictated by the number of pitches in each of the hymn's four phrases. Referring to **example 4**, one can see that the first phrase contains twelve pitches, the second contains eight pitches, the third contains eleven pitches and the fourth contains six pitches. Alternating between this numerical ordering (12, 8, 11, 6) and its reverse (6, 11, 8, 12) results in the following palindrome: 12, 6, 8, 11, 11, 8, 6, 12. This set of numbers determined how many measures were in each musical episode. For example, the melodic material in the first episode, which begins with the pickup to m. 1, comes to completion in m. 12. (Though there is an extra measure (m. 13) in this episode, it was a later addition meant to prolong the harmony and provide an adequate transition to the following music.) Likewise, the melodic material in the second episode accounts for six bars of the piece between m. 14 and m. 19. **Table 4** breaks down the various episode lengths according to the number sequence. It is clear from this table that in some cases the numerical scheme did not work. The seventh episode (mm. 66-77), for instance, should have been six bars when in reality it turned out to be twelve. This was necessary in order to avoid excessive rhythmic and subphrasal repetition. Since the episodes in the piece alternate mainly between the first and second themes, this overall structural plan allowed for continuity as well as for maximum variation in length, helping to reinforce the notion of a pluralistic identity.

Table 4 | episode lengths according to the number sequence

EPISODE NUMBER	MEASURE NUMBERS	SEQUENCE NUMBER	ACTUAL NUMBER
1 (Theme 1)	1-12 (13)	12	12 (13)
2 (Theme 2	14-19	6	6
3 (Th. 1 Var. 3)	(20) 21-28 (29-30)	8	8 (11)
4 (Th. 2 Var. 1	31-41 (42)	11	11 (12)
5 (Th. 1 Var. 2)	(43) 44-54 (55-56)	11	11 (13)
6 (Th. 2 Var. 2)	57-65	8	9
7 (Th. 3)	66-77	6	12
8 (RCP, Th. 1 Var. 1)	78-86	n/a	9
9 (CDA)	87-98	12	12

2.2.4 TENSION

In *Falling Up*, I examined one approach to a narrative structuring of musical ideas. Essential to this objective is the presentation and evaluation of different tensions, or what James Jakob Liszka referred to as transvaluation in his book *The Semiotic of Myth*.[47] Though Liska's theory is intended for the analysis of literature, Byron Almèn and Robert Hatten, in their essay "Narrative Engagement with Twentieth Century Music,"[48] repurpose this concept as an analytical tool applicable to music. Relying on Liszka as their primary source, the authors define transvaluation as "a significant, temporalized change of state that affects the ranking of values in a given hierarchy."[49] They demonstrate that, when applied to music, transvaluation can have potent implications "involving reversals that either upset or reaffirm the prevailing order, leading to a variety of outcomes (tragic, comic, romantic, ironic)."[50] Tension, therefore, is not necessarily a specific moment of conflict, but rather the process by which different value systems are compromised. More precisely, Almèn and Hatten, claim that "it is the set of rules that articulate the initial hierarchy that are placed in crisis, not (or at

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[47] James Jakob Liszka, *The Semiotic of Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
[48] Byron Almèn and Robert Hatten, "Narrative Engagement with Twentieth Century Music," in *Narrative Since 1900*, ed. by Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 59-85.
[49] Ibid., 59.
[50] Ibid.

least not necessarily) the actorial elements that may or may not help to flesh out this process."[51] Since value systems are largely a psychological construct, the scope of musical strategies available to the composer when inventing these hierarchies is immense. In *Falling Up*, multiple value systems are implemented and later challenged, resulting in a confluence of tensions. These range from localized harmonic hierarchies to overall structural hierarchies.

At this point, it is clear that the contrasting qualities of the two main themes are a noteworthy feature of this piece. Each theme possesses its own internal set of harmonic hierarchies, which result in two highly individualized sound worlds. Drawing on tonality and traditional modality, the first theme establishes a pitch center around D, which functions as a minor dominant to what eventually becomes the home key of G minor as emphasized by the repetition of Bb and its resolution to G. In just the first four-and-a-half bars of the piece, one can perceive layers of pitches that effectively weigh more than others. Transvaluation or tension, however, does not occur in a traditional tonal capacity. In m. 6 and mm. 9-10, the rules that dictate tonal unrest become irrelevant when non-diatonic diads and triads represent the tensest music. While it may seem obvious to use pitches outside of the related key areas to create turbulence, these two moments are still connected to the home key area(s) as neighbor notes. Tension, therefore, does not occur within the chords themselves or from their placement in a tonal hierarchy but it instead becomes evident from the context in which these chords appear.

By comparison, the second theme employs an entirely different harmonic hierarchy. Since composers cannot rely upon specific intervallic relationships such as the tritone to project a state of instability outside of a tonal framework, they are challenged to resort to alternative methods. Philip Lambert, in his essay entitled "Ives and Berg: "Normative"

[51] Almèn and Hatten, "Narrative Engagement with Twentieth Century Music," 76.

Procedures and Post-Tonal Alternatives,"[52] identifies Ives as a composer who sought out unconventional approaches to the "post-tonal quandary,"[53] resulting in various musical outcomes. These

> range from full-blown adoptions of the normative tonal system that his contemporaries were trying to abandon, to earnest attempts at developing normative procedures that would replace the tonal ones, to works based on reflexive procedures that would seem to deny any basic need for pre-compositional norms. (Lambert 1996, 105)

Of his decision to work with different pitch-structuring procedures, Ives says,

> Why tonality as such should be thrown out for good, I can't see. Why it should be always present, I can't see. It depends, it seems to me, a good deal – as clothes depend on the thermometer – on what one is trying to do… (Ives ed. by Boatwright 1970, 117)

Though *Falling Up*'s second theme uses a partial serial approach, it still depends upon consonance to depict a sense of order. Consonance, however, plays a secondary role to simultaneity. Therefore, order is achieved when all sounding instruments appear in rhythmic unison on a consonant interval regardless of how fleeting the moment might be. One example occurs at the beginning of the second theme in m. 14 where the flute and clarinet can be seen to be playing the same rhythm in major thirds (see **example 7**). This brief moment of stability is disrupted by a pizzicato attack in the strings, which initiates a small flurry of independent pitch and rhythmic activity in the flute and clarinet before coming together again briefly on a thirty-second note unison D in m. 15. A similar example is seen in m. 18 in a doubling of Db and Ab between the flute, clarinet and violin (see **example 8**).

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[52] Philip Lambert, "Ives and Berg: "Normative" Procedures and Post-Tonal Alternatives," in *Charles Ives and the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Geoffrey Bloch and J. Peter Burkholder (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 105-130.
[53] Ibid., 105.

Example 7 | flute and clarinet with corresponding rhythms

Example 8 | perfect fifth consonance

Though it is also quite brief, this moment is significant because it follows the rules of 18th century counterpoint insofar as a perceived leading tone (C) resolves upwards to Db and the seventh (A) resolves downward to Ab, albeit an octave higher. The cello, which does not sound on these pitches, helps to reinforce a sense of stability with an enharmonic fifth below Db (F#). In many ways, the approach used in the second theme is in direct opposition to

that used in the first theme though both themes tend toward tension and resolution through a disordering of their respective harmonic norms.

In their chapter, Almèn and Hatten address the issue of order and its ramifications in a post-tonal idiom:

> It is important to note that in the semiotic opposition "order/transgression," the term *order* is employed in the sense of "hierarchy" or "ordering of values," *not* that of "stability" or "lacking chaotic features." Given that this term is typically applied first to the initial hierarchical configuration of a piece, it would be inappropriate and inaccurate to limit such configurations to those that are orderly or stable. Indeed there are many pieces in which the initial "order" (hierarchy) is dysphoric, unstable, or problematic, motivating a transgression that addresses these instabilities or problems. (Almèn and Hatten 2013, 77)

The structuring of themes in *Falling Up* takes this argument into careful consideration. One might be tempted to claim that the first theme represents order and the second, chaos. The emergence of the third theme, which appears in mm. 36-41 and mm. 66-77 before returning in m. 87, shows that such a claim would be inaccurate. A more precise explanation would describe the dysphoric first part (or the constant movement between themes one and two) as the initial hierarchy and the third theme as a re-imagination of values found in the first and second themes, and therefore, a form of thematic transgression. The third theme could be seen as a point of stability, since it draws equally on the harmonic transparency of the first theme and the rhythmic agility of the second theme and is, hence, an assimilation of both ideas. The purpose, however, of the third theme is to remind the listener/observer that with age a multiplicity of childhood memories (or identities) is often amassed into a single, muted memory or state of being. This is perceived as a tension because contentment is rarely achieved when one resigns oneself to "unremembrance."[54]

[54] Wislawa Szymborska, "While Sleeping" in *Enough/Wystarczy*, trans. by Clare Cavanagh (Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2014), 29.

A potential criticism is that for a narrative advancing sequence of events to be successful, it must have a consistent medial agent – meaning that it must be based solely in literature, music, movement, drama, etc. or some combination of these media. I would argue, however, that a juxtaposition of two or more media creates just as compelling a narrative structure, and in this piece is, in fact, essential to its embodiment of tension.

The bookending of *Falling Up* with Rimbaud and Silverstein's poems presented an interesting challenge in that neither text is intrinsically narrative. Rimbaud describes a person deep in the throes of an identity crisis, while Silverstein depicts a child-like awe inspired by the world around it. My task, therefore, was to compose a piece of music that made Silverstein's broad, literary strokes a plausible outcome of Rimbaud's vigilant illustration of youthful confusion and self-discovery. While this is accomplished through a continuous juxtaposition of the first and second themes and the eventual arrival of the third theme, I would point to the lack of text in the music as being particularly pertinent to the narrative goals of this project. Like Knussen's *Songs Without Voices*,[55] which emphasizes the loss of Andrezj Panufnik in the composer's decision not to set the accompanying texts for voice (Whitman's "Soon Shall the Winter's Foil Be Here,"[56] A Prairie Sunset"[57] and "The First Dandelion"[58]) but for the instruments available in the ensemble, *Falling Up* withholds the *I* or the narrating voice, but in order to address the passing of childhood and the changing of perspective. This is a consequence of the fractured personality that Rimbaud writes about in his poem. Though this state of unknowing is depicted by the sudden and frequent movement between themes in the early part of the piece, the re-emergence of the *I* in

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[55] Oliver Knussen, *Songs Without Voices* (London: Faber Music, 1992).
[56] Walt Whitman, "Soon Shall the Winter's Foil Be Here," in *Complete Works* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 538.
[57] Ibid., 540.
[58] Ibid., 520.

Silverstein's poem becomes a conceivable arrival point through the unifying qualities of the third theme. The piece, therefore, functions as a restructuring of Rimbaud's conceptual values, motivating a return, however distorted, to a new and different self.

2.2.5 CONCLUSIONS

Falling Up demonstrates a critical engagement with narrative procedures in music by questioning their structural integrity across art forms and experimenting with those elements that are essential (musical or literary) to a narrative handling of material. Central to this is the exploration of the meaning and consequences of tension and how those play out in isolation. The result of many arduous attempts to carefully and accurately accommodate the often-unwieldy twists and turns of various texts, this piece illustrates a willingness to develop a space where musical ideas can act autonomously while still maintaining a strong connection to those texts on which they are based.

2.3 AS THOUGH BIRDS

for orchestra

2.3.1 INFLUENCE OF CONSTRAINED WRITING

In January 2013, I was commissioned to write a four-minute orchestral work for the London Symphony Orchestra's Discovery Panufnik Scheme. The concept behind this piece emerged from my interest in the relationship between creative constraints and miniature forms. According to Stravinsky,

> The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit…the arbitrariness of the constraint only serves to obtain precision of execution. (Stravinsky 1970, 49)

The writings of Félix Fénéon (1861-1944), a Parisian anarchist and art critic, influenced the thinking behind this piece. Published anonymously throughout 1906 in the

French daily newspaper, *Le Matin*, and translated as *Novels in three lines,*[59] Fénéon's news items tell the ironic, hilarious, tragic and surreal stories of everyday life with photographic detail and linguistic precision. His "novels" generated questions of how the substance of a narrative could be captured in just three lines. While it is true that Todorov's definition of narrative (quoted in chapter 1.2.3) can be applied to almost any story, Fénéon's three-line news summaries certainly come within its purview. For example: "Eugène Périchot, of Pailles, near Saint-Maixent, entertained at his home Mme Lemartrier. Eugène Dupuis came to fetch her. They killed him. Love."[60] In his introduction to the book, Luc Sante points out that Fénéon's *faits-divers* (fillers) present ingeniously pointillistic realizations of sundry events, but more surprisingly, the full collection paints a vivid and colorful image of Paris in 1906. This scaled relationship forms the foundation of my orchestral piece.

2.3.2 MISDIRECTION

Inspired by Fénéon's three line novels, *as though birds* originates from the American poet Jonathan Dubow's "Fugal." Written in nine three-line stanzas, the poem is unusual in that it can be read either horizontally or vertically, allowing the reader to construct their own version of the text. Individually, these stanzas, as the title suggests, represent flight or dissemination. This is apparent in the final three (horizontal) stanzas of the poem:

as though birds, startled	tongues escape	the black sand of river
by a moulting sound	like ash	that will undress itself
quietly dispersed	on west wind	to swim into ocean.[61]

My initial sketches for the piece realized these stanzas as three micro-variations based on a vocal setting of the text. Idiomatically inappropriate for the voice **(example 9)**, these

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[59] Félix Fénéon, *Novels in three lines*, trans. by Luc Sante (New York: The New York Book Review, 2007).
[60] Ibid., 22.
[61] Jonathan Dubow, "Fugal," *Drunken Boat* 13 (Winter 2010-11), accessed March 2013, http://www.drunkenboat.com/db13/6fpp/dubow/fugal.php.

melodies helped generate large-scale musical ideas. This plan proved to be too expansive for such a short piece resulting in a treatment of the text that was literal and derivative. The use of one stanza (as though birds, startled/ by a moulting sound/ quietly dispersed) ensured a sense of brevity, cohesion, and the potential for a nuanced musical narrative.

Example 9 | vocal setting of Dubow's poem

as though birds as though birds as though birds

start - led by a moult - ing sound (quietly) dis - persed

tongues es - cape like ash on west - wind

es - cape like ash on west - wind

the black sand of riv - er that will un - dress it - self to swim in - to o - cean

2.3.3 PROGRAM MUSIC?

My objective in creating *as though birds* was to address the question of what my music must be made of in order to be a capable narrative agent. I did *not* want it to be traditional program music, sharing as I do Carolyn Abbate's skeptical view that program music can be one-dimensional mimesis or retelling of physical and psychological incidents in musical terms. Under such circumstances, it would seem that music has no autonomous qualities that

allow it to comment on the action. Rather, it is dependent upon the narrative of the program that the music attempts to embody. Abbate articulates this idea:

> We might think of a plastic analogy, that of a bas-relief depicting a murder. Suppose that bas-relief is subsequently covered in gold leaf, which traces its every curve without discrimination or comment. Is the gold leaf itself narrative? Can music – so long as it is understood as *tracing* a dramatic plot, a series of nonmusical actions, or a collection of psychological conditions ever be narrative in itself? (Abbate 1991, 27)

Text and the music in *as though birds* sought to occupy an in-between space – one in which the music relied on the poem for context, but was also independent of it. But if the text exists in advance of the music, how can I do anything other than narrate the images it describes?

Dubow's poem provided a unique opportunity to establish the presence of a narrative force – a discursive distance. The subject of his excerpt is not startled birds quietly flying away but rather, something that is *like* this series of events. The fact that the text is a metaphor for something similar yet intrinsically different opened up a space for this piece. *As though birds* took on the role of the object (or narrative) about which Dubow was writing, essentially inverting the miming model to create a work that was his extra-literary inspiration – the *real* thing.

2.3.4 DESCRIPTION OF PIECE

Dubow's analogy is qualified by an ironic and paradoxical depiction of reality. The key moments in the poem (*birds, startled; moulting sound; dispersed*) become musical caricatures or quasi-parodical representations of these images that over time tell their own inevitable stories. As a first example of this caricaturing, the *moulting sound* appears at the beginning of the piece as bubbling, unmuted, brass attacks (**example 10**). This buoyant and sometimes erratic gesture is subsequently reinterpreted both in orchestration and character. **Examples 11a-c** illustrate how the *moulting sound* changes throughout the piece.

Example 10 | initial "moulting sound," mm. 11-15

Example 11a | "moulting sound," mm. 56-59

Example 11b | "moulting sound," mm. 96-104

Example 11c | "moulting sound," mm. 137-143

Similarly exaggerated depictions and transformations of the poem's other images can be traced throughout the music as well. The *birds* of the piece's opening section were designed to avoid allusions to realism. There is no complex heterophony or polyphony masquerading as birdsong or bird flight. Instead, there is a single loud and grotesque meta-bird that quacks and snaps (**example 12**) irreverently at choice moments.

Example 12 | initial "birds," mm. 10-12

Though this manifestation of the birds is distilled and reinterpreted in the following sections, it changes throughout the piece. Moments of reprieve appear where the birds assume a more recognizable sonic identity. The following examples (**examples 13a-c)** locate these moments:

Example 13a | "birds," mm. 44-66

Example 13b | "birds," mm. 70-75

Example 13c | “birds,” mm. 109-115, winds, trumpets, percussion, harp

When the birds do eventually *disperse*, the initial musical rendering is not as quiet as in Dubow poem. The orchestra flares up in a raucous flourish as the A section explodes into the B section (**example 14**). Like the other images, this one transforms. **Examples 15a-c** track the development of this image.

Example 14 |
initial "dispersion,"
m. 39, tutti

Example 15a | "disperse," mm. 47-55

Example 15b | "disperse," mm. 104-106

Example 15c | "disperse," mm. 151-159, percussion harp, strings

The embellishment of life-like scenarios that is central to this piece reaches far beyond gesture. The narrative of the poem was used as a model for creating a compositional process from which all aspects of the music are derived. Its results range from the chronology of composition and the manipulation of individual pitches to the piece's overall structure. Originally composed to be a highly lyrical line, the pitches used in the melodic setting of "as though birds" were refashioned into the bass line for section A (*moulting sound* bass line.) What followed were two freely composed, contrasting melodies that compare to the birds and their flight, respectively **(example 16)**.

The first of these two melodies (*birds* melody; foundational material for section C) is a frantic and nervous transcription of a flock of startled birds. This material devolves into a

sparse and distantly tolling melody (*dispersed* melody; foundational material for section D) that brings the piece to a close just after vanishing. The core harmonies of the piece are based loosely on a vertical (metered) alignment of the *moulting sound* and *birds* melodies because of their similar lengths and abundance of motivic connections.

Example 16 | vertical alignment of three melodies with resulting harmonies

The effects of this reoccurring procedure are further seen at the phrasal, sectional, and macro-formal levels. Each phrase was constructed to have a central pitch area that was then disrupted by the inflection of another pitch area before departing to it. This happens at the very onset of the piece.

Example 17 | reduction of mm. 1-7

From **example 17**, one can hear the opening chord as having a gravitational pull toward D for two reasons. Firstly, D is the lowest sounding pitch in the opening chord with all of the

remaining notes in the chord built upon that pitch. Secondly, the tonal tendencies of Db and Eb move toward D. The departure to another pitch area is made clear by the three ascending chords (linked to the first chord by D as a common tone in the second chord) that follow the opening chord before arriving at F in the double basses. The use of F as a focal point in the next phrase is further reinforced by the fact that it is the only pitch reiterated in each of the four opening chords.

In some cases, this process described above failed to work. An example of this can be seen below.

Example 18 | reduction of mm. 85-89

Ab major vs. Ab minor

F# arrival point

potentially interruptive
pitches - not strong enough

This passage does not follow the model for a number of reasons. Because Ab major and Ab minor are in constant disagreement, neither diatonic key area has any hierarchical pull. Furthermore, the only three pitches not encompassed by these key areas are A, D, E and G. While all four pitches make brief appearances, they are barely audible and lack the strength to constitute interruptions. The only elements propelling this phrase toward the new pitch area of F# are the upward contour of the bass line (in the 2nd violins, piano and 3rd oboe) and the dynamic indications.

While the poem's three distinct images correspond to the three main sections (A, C and D) as seen in **example 16**, the story of those images can also be observed *within* the sections. Section A (*moulting sound* bass line), for example, also features the *birds* (m. 10)

dispersing (m. 39). The two other main sections follow this model as well. In ordering the material this way, my goal was to return to the initial idea of micro-variations while ensuring that the poem determined all aspects of the piece's design.

The macro-tonal plan for this piece is derived from the melodies and harmonies that are presented in **example 16**. On a large-scale, it illustrates the stability of one pitch center leading to many unstable pitch centers followed by a departure to a new pitch area.

Example 19 | *as though birds* structural analysis

Section: A B C (a) B D (a) E (coda)

Measures: 1-39 40-46 47-103 (93-103) 104-106 107-140 141-159

Section A, which structurally represents the *moulting sound* is firmly centered around F and Bb. While the presence of F is maintained throughout section C (as an allusion to the omnipotence of the *moulting sound*), the structural presence of Ab, Gb (F#), C and F emphasizes the panicked state of the *startled birds*. The cadential presence of G (m. 120, emerging from the pitch center Bb) in section D puts some distance between the *birds* and the *moulting sound*. G, as a pitch area, anticipates their scattering to E and B at the end of section E.

2.3.5 CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning, my approach to structure and process was intended to obligingly build the poem into the fabric of the music. As the piece began to take shape, the hyper-integration of the poem's imagery dominated every facet of its existence that it was difficult not to think of it as a complete exaggeration of the narrative. While the process itself does not transform in the way that the other elements do, it serves as a reminder that distance could exist between music and text, distorting and redefining Dubow's sense of reality, so

that the inevitable story becomes the transposition of purely musical events. When I first heard the piece live, I was struck by how little distance had actually been achieved. Paradoxically, my attention to the text's presence in the music made the alternative narrative progression completely imperceptible, and I was left wondering if the piece was actually any different from the poem. I felt I had created its musical clone.

2.4 SLEEP & UNREMEMBRANCE

for orchestra

2.4.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE TEXT AND PROJECT GOALS

Commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra in 2014, *Sleep & Unremembrance* is based on Wislawa Szymborska's poem, "While Sleeping," which was written in 2011 and published in a 2014 collection entitled *Enough*. Szymborska, who passed away in 2012, belonged to a generation of post-war Polish poets whose work emerged from the constraints of nearly four and a half decades of Communist rule. Born in 1923 in Bnin, Poland and raised in Krakow, Szymborska bore witness to the Nazi and Soviet regimes. An early Communist sympathizer, she distanced herself from these political views in the 1950s and rescinded all of her work written during that time. Those who are familiar with her poetry from the latter half of the 20th century will value it for its microcosmic grandeur and deeply metaphysical understanding of day-to-day existence, qualities found in work by other prominent artists including Emily Dickinson, Joseph Cornell, the Quay Brothers, and Wes Anderson. Szymborska took great pleasure in the quotidian: "scissors, violins, tenderness,

transistors, water dams, jokes, teacups."[62] In her 1996 Nobel acceptance speech, she explained her aesthetic:

> "Astonishing" is an epithet concealing a logical trap. We're astonished, after all, by things that deviate from some well known and universally acknowledged norm, from an obviousness we've grown accustomed to. Granted, in daily speech, where we don't stop to consider every word, we all use phrases like "the ordinary world," "ordinary life," "the ordinary course of events." …But in the language of poetry, where every word is weighed, nothing is usual or normal. Not a single stone and not a single cloud above it. Not a single day and not a single night after it. And above all, not a single existence, not anyone's existence in the world. (Szymborska 1996, Nobel Lecture)

Written shortly before her death, "While Sleeping" is a meditation on the brevity and tenuousness of life. It attempts to make sense of memories changed so drastically by time that they inevitably disappear. Disguised in a dream sequence, the poem depicts a frantic quest to remember and rewrite "the ordinary course of events"[63] that marks our lives as special or unordinary. When the narrator awakes to realize that only two and a half minutes have passed with no recollection of the dream, the reader is forced to consider that forgetfulness is part of the cycle of life. The poem in its entirety appears below:

WHILE SLEEPING

I dreamed I was looking for something,
maybe hidden somewhere or lost
under the bed, under the stairs,
under an old address.

I dug through wardrobes, boxes and drawers
pointlessly packed with stuff and nonsense.
I pulled from my suitcases
the years and journeys I'd picked up.

I shook from my pockets
withered letters, litter, leaves not addressed to me.

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[62] Wislawa Szymborska, "Here" in *Here*, trans. by Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010), 3.
[63] Wislawa Szymborska, "The Poet and the World," (Nobel Lecture, Stockholm City Hall, Stockholm, Sweden, December 7, 1996).

I ran panting
through comforting, discomfiting
displaces, places.

I floundered through tunnels of snow
and unremembrance.

I got stuck in thorny thickets
and conjectures.

I swam through air
and the grass of childhood.

I hustled to finish up
before the outdated dusk fell,
the curtain, silence.

In the end I stopped knowing
what I'd been looking for so long.

I woke up.
Looked at my watch.
The dream took not quite two and a half minutes.

Such are the tricks to which time resorts
ever since it started stumbling
on sleeping heads. (Szymborska 2014, 29-30)

Unlike *as though birds* which had a linear narrative of specific musical gestures following a course of action throughout the piece, *Sleep & Unremembrance* takes a structural approach to narrative, employing narrative benchmarks or vertical moments that denote a change of events. Similar to *as though birds*, my goal was to compose a piece that relied on a text for its core material but had the ability to venture autonomously into new territory. *Sleep & Unremembrance* features two major points of intersection between the poem and the music (materiality and structure) and one major point of divergence which I explain in the following subchapters.

2.4.2 INTERSECTION A: MOTIVE

The first discernable link between text and music occurs at the point where Szymborska's imagery meets the motivic musical material. Typical of her poetry, the beginning is characterized by commonplace items such as a bed, stairs, an old address, wardrobes, boxes, drawers, suitcases, pockets, letters, litter and leaves. Legend has it that Szymborska used to keep collectibles from her travels and small, inexpensive gifts from friends – things that most people would throw away – in drawers around her apartment. These items included airsickness bags from various airlines, Pez candy dispensers, mechanical pencils and trashy postcards. These drawers seemed to be the key to Szymborska's hidden life, her own vault of secrets.

The early sketches of this piece explored the idea of the drawer. My concern for oneness between the text and music at the onset of the work resulted in a nine-bar phrase for glockenspiel, crotales, and celesta (**example 20**) meant to evoke the sound of a music box. As this phrase slowed down after several repetitions – like a real music box – the remaining instrumental families (winds, brass and strings) began to sustain pitches from the eight-bar phrase, eventually culminating into a chromatic cluster and revealing the secrets hidden within this box. This initial approach proved to be limiting. Trapped by the repeating music, the piece was cut off from the poem's other imagery, resulting in an angular and highly literal interpretation of Szymborska's poem.

Consequently, I composed a series of very different musical fragments that became the backbone of the piece as it exists today. Unlike the first attempt, these ideas were not meant to depict specific images or words in the poem but to represent three of the most conventional musical events that, under different circumstances, may not be recognized as distinctive. **Examples 21a-c** present these motives as they appeared in their original forms

during the pre-compositional phase. Common to these three ideas is their function as developmental or transitional material as seen in repertoire of the 18th and 19th centuries. While my motivic ideas are not at all quotations from music of this era and were composed as fragments, it is easy to imagine them originating from a larger musical context.[64] Extracting them from this imaginary context, they became found objects much like the boxes, drawers, letters and leaves of Szymborska's poem.

Example 20 | initial nine-bar phrase

Glockenspiel
Crotales
Celesta
Glk.
crt.

Example 21a | motive A, scalar figure

Example 21b | motive B, sequence of sixths

Example 21c | motive C, repeated notes

8va

[64] This approach was largely inspired by an encounter I had with *object theater* in which actors assume the roles of inanimate objects. A narrative is built around the interactions between these anthropomorphized objects.

2.4.3 INTERSECTION B: DIVISION AND STRUCTURE

Throughout my doctoral work, I have tried to distill and refine compositional ideas into succinct musical statements. This direction has made writing longer pieces difficult. Szymborska's poem provided an opportunity to address this technical matter through an exploration of the tensions that emerge between small musical fragments and more expansive music. The process of shaping the motives discussed in the previous subchapter into larger-scale ideas required an analysis of the relationship between textual motives and structure in the poem. Each stanza has its own distinctive set of everyday objects and situations. These common occurrences are never explained or developed. To some readers, the first part of Szymborska's poem may seem like a glorified list, but to me, that list tells an interesting story of concrete, visible, tactile objects ("wardrobes, boxes, drawers"[65]) gradually disappearing ("I floundered through tunnels of snow and unremembrance."[66]) until they have been lost completely ("In the end I stopped knowing what I'd been looking for so long."[67]).

Like the first section of the poem, the first half of my piece (section A) consists of ten small vignettes. Each of these subsections features the three motives as its main subject. **Table 5** relates subsections 1-10 (mm. 1-147) to their corresponding motive(s). Within these sections, each motive becomes an object like those in the poem. Like a picture on a wall or a snapshot, they also lack development and are simply there for the listener to notice. To facilitate this aim, the piece was composed in non-chronological order. Much like the imagery peppered throughout the poem, *Sleep & Unremembrance* started off as collage of small musical ideas that were later

[65] Szymborska, "While Sleeping" in *Enough*, 29.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 31.

Table 5 | subsections of A with corresponding motives

SUBSECTIONS OF A	CORRESPONDING MOTIVE
1 | mm. 1-20	motive A
2 | mm. 21-25	motive A
3 | mm. 26-29	motive B
4 | mm. 30-46	motives A & C
5 | mm. 47-50	motive B
6 | mm. 51-73	motives A & C
7 | mm. 74-87	motives A & C
8 | mm. 88-98	motive C
9 | mm. 99-120	motives A & B
10 | mm. 121-147	motive A

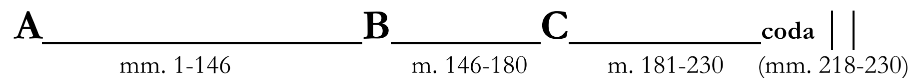
assembled into the desired order and fused together with short transitional passages. These subsections always break off in new directions, seldom returning to any previously heard music. Up close, the resulting structural shape is reminiscent of Stockhausen's moment form aptly described by G. W. Hopkins as music in which "[e]ach individually characterized passage…is regarded as an experiential unit, a 'moment,' which can potentially engage the listener's full attention and can do so in exactly the same measure as its neighbors. No single 'moment' claims priority[.]"[68] From a distance, the sudden contrasts between sections become less discernable while the over-arching poetic theme (memories – or motives – fading) becomes clearer.

[68] G. W. Hopkins, "Stockhausen, Karlheinz," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillian, 1980), vol. 18, 152.

2.4.4 DIVERGENCE

Formally, the music and the poem bear a close resemblance. Szymborska's poem can easily be divided into three unequal sections: a dream sequence (st. 1-10), a call to reality (st. 11) and a conclusion (st. 12). The music follows a similar plan: mm. 1-147 represent the dream sequence, mm. 148-179 correspond to the narrator's awakening and mm. 180-230 conclude the piece. **Figure 3** provides a brief structural analysis of the piece. Though the music and the poem are similar on the surface, the B and C sections are noticeably different in content and character from their equivalent stanzas. Musical divergence from the text is achieved through various forms of opposition.

Figure 3 | structural analysis of *Sleep & Unremembrance*



This is first observed in the B section. Unlike its poetic parallel (st. 11) in which the narrator emerges from a temporally amorphous dream sequence into an angular reality, the orchestra pursues a reversal of these events. Beginning at m. 148, the music is defined by a lack of immediacy and pulse, allowing it to float much more than any preceding music. This is initially accomplished by a reduced tempo marking (q = 52) as well as sustained string chords and later, by the use of resonant metallic percussion, harp and celesta and textural, arrhythmic wind figurations. As a result, there is significantly less emphasis placed on recurring motives, gestures and lines while more emphasis is given to the blurring of harmonic fields through overlapping chords.

Conversely, the C section deals with opposition through a clarification of musical material. Where Szymborska concedes to "unremembrance" in the last stanza of the poem (st. 12), a distinct melodic line gradually comes into focus between mm. 180 and 217. Broken

up by two short interludes featuring sustained chords, this line is passed between the piccolo, first desk violins and upper winds, culminating in a viola solo that begins in m. 213. One defining quality that allows this music to evoke a sense of clarity is the hierarchy that is established through foregrounded and backgrounded material. At moments where the melody stands out, the orchestra takes on an accompanimental role through the use of repeated figurations that delineate supporting harmonies. The lessening of orchestral forces and simplification of musical material in m. 213 represents the most transparent moment in the piece. Consequently, the music is, perhaps, farthest away from the text at this point.

As these ideas subtly articulate, the greatest point of distinction between *Sleep & Unremembrance* and "While Sleeping" is perspective. Szymborska undoubtedly knew that her death was imminent when she wrote the poem. A heavy smoker, she passed away at the age of eighty-eight after a long battle with lung cancer. The poem, therefore, can be interpreted as a final acknowledgment of life passing and memories disappearing: "the tricks to which time resorts ever since it started stumbling on sleeping heads." As a young composer just embarking upon a lifetime of musical experiences, however, the subject matter of this poem allowed for a powerful opportunity to explore the lucidity of present-day situations and compositional decisions that will eventually fade into memory. For Szymborska, these moments were receding; for me, they are happening now.

2.4.5 CODA AND CONCLUSIONS

On June 5, 2015, the first one-hundred-forty-six bars of *Sleep & Unremembrance* were read by the LSO in their annual Panufnik Scheme workshop. The workshop revealed a number of problems that were addressed in later versions of the piece. One immediate area of concern was the orchestration. The initial rendering of the piece treated the orchestra too heavily for what was necessary in the first section. This was due in large part to an over-

scoring of bass frequencies as well as an over-emphasis on closely spaced chords at the bottom of the orchestra. This weighed the piece down at moments where it was supposed to be buoyant while obscuring a great deal of orchestrational detail in the middle register. Other requisite adjustments included rebarring and renotating certain passages to facilitate easier entrances as well as address ensemble issues that arose across the orchestra.

The most surprising outcome of the workshop was the realization that this first section of music could only make a broader impression if heard in the context of the rest of the work. Many orchestra members noted that the role of their respective parts was often unclear in the overall landscape of the piece. They were confused as to which strands of music were to stand out in the foreground and how this first section could eventually necessitate departures to new musical ideas. At first, I interpreted this criticism as insurmountable: the music I had written made very little sense. Upon revisiting the poem, I discovered that this issue presented a fortuitous opportunity to further investigate the narrative potential that music holds by putting the piece in a new form of dialogue with the text. Certain parallels made this possible. For example, the first section of the poem (sts. 1-10) required the final two stanzas for contextualization. Furthermore, Szymborska's quintessential list of objects and experiences that open the poem complement the anti-developmental nature of the piece's A section quite well. Consequently, the music and the poem naturally emanate from the same origin. They ultimately become independent of one another such that a listener might begin to question the robustness of their interconnectedness. The coda (mm. 218-230) acts as a solution to this dilemma by welding certain aspects of the music and text back together before the piece concludes. For example, the arrival of the F# pedal point in m. 218 functions in a dual capacity. From a certain perspective, its grounding could be interpreted as a metaphor for the stability that comes

with acceptance as is true in Szymborska's case. On the other hand, it begins to acquire a tension that transforms it into a dominant, longing to resolve to B which it does only briefly before escaping to a low G in the double basses. The instability of this last sonority is further reinforced by the presence of pitches Eb, F, A and B in m. 229 in the upper strings – an enharmonic, first-inversion, French augmented sixth chord in the key of Eb. In effect, the role of B as a tonic is redefined as a predominant. The piece, therefore, ends on a chord that sounds like a half cadence, which, to me, serves as a reminder that anticipation, mystery, surprise and change are all to come. Without the coda, the text served only as a starting point. With it, however, the words illuminate new directions in the music, which, hopefully, reveal a more personal understanding of the poem.

2.5 THREE PIECES
for guitar and optional narrator

2.5.1 DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND GOALS

Three Pieces, for guitar and optional narrator, began as a collaborative project with my fellow Marshall Scholars, guitarist Michael Poll, writer Sophia Veltfort and the actor Garrett Turner. This piece was brought to fruition with the help of a Guildhall/Barbican ColLABorate grant, which aims to support interdepartmental work. *Three Pieces* functions as an independent musical component to an adapted version of Veltfort's short story, *To the Sea in a Sieve*.[69] The story describes the intricacies of one woman's experiences as a Cuban immigrant in the 1970s and 80s and as a mother through stories that she shares with her young daughter, Clara. Unlike the other projects in my portfolio, the details of these stories had little influence over the music as it appears on the page. The music, instead, draws on

[69] Sophia Veltfort, *To the Sea in a Sieve*, (Unpublished, 2014).

large-scale concepts found in the text as a guide to compositional decisions. The text and music run parallel to one another rather than being integrated compositionally.

2.5.2 DIALOGUE

Veltfort's story is notable for its dialogic quality built as it is upon conversations between Ada and Clara as well as between Ada and other characters including her father, Danielle, the dancer in 1B, Marlena, and Angel. Through these conversations, Veltfort highlights those connections that exist between past and present. She emphasizes how we, as humans, are in constant dialogue with our own experiences.

As a result, the textual element of *Three Pieces* is unusual. The actual music was written away from the text so that the narrated lines are not notated in the score as they are in Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat*,[70] Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*,[71] Weir's *The Consolations of Scholarship*[72] or even Ernst Toch's *Geographical Fugue*.[73] Instead, this decision takes after flexibly notated pieces like Stravinsky's *The Flood*.[74] Originally, the piece was to be performed so that an excerpt of text followed each movement, neither element overlapping with the other. It was later agreed that the text could be as musically interwoven as the performers felt was necessary to support their vision and interpretation of the piece. This fostered an unusual approach to collaboration. Unlike my other musical experiences, my compositional contribution accounted for only part of the eventual outcome. The complete piece was brought to life through the choices that were made by the performers in rehearsal. These involved decisions regarding the extent to which the text would be integrated into the music, which musical/textual excerpts were important to hear on their own, where

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[70] Igor Stravinsky, *L'histoire du soldat*, (London: Chester Music Ltd., 1920)
[71] Arnold Schoenberg, *Ode to Napolean Buonaparte* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1945).
[72] Judith Weir, *The Consolations of Scholarship* (London: Novello & Co., 1985).
[73] Ernst Toch, *Geographical Fugue* (New York: Mills Music, 1950).
[74] Igor Stravinsky, *The Flood* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1961-62).

text/music would enter if there was to be overlap and where musical/textual ideas would line up. Other possibilities to consider were the loose rhythmic relationships between text/music (i.e. a chord might punctuate the end of a sentence), representational connections, if any, and how much time would be taken by the performers throughout the piece. Interestingly, the premiere of this piece was highly specific to the collaborative dynamic between Poll, Turner, Veltfort, and myself. Consequently, the piece will never be performed twice in the same way.

Three Pieces has been performed three times, each performance unlike the previous one. The premiere was given at the Milton Court Theatre and is the one described throughout this commentary. The second performance, which took place at Goodenough College with Poll and Turner, reverted back to the original conception of the piece where the individual movements were interspersed with text. In a third performance at the Milton Court Concert Hall, Poll went so far as to perform the work as a set of solo guitar pieces without the text. Many audience members were in attendance at all three performances. Several people were struck by how fresh each performance seemed to them. The greatest compliment came from Veltfort's mother who noted that the different versions of the piece seemed to be in dialogue with one another, providing unusual insights into the world of Ada and Clara and into our team's creative process.

2.5.3 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, *Three Pieces* accomplishes what it set out to do, albeit in an unexpected way. What was intended to be a piece that treated text and music as coexisting entities with little tension between them turned out to be far more interconnected than originally planned. This was a result of our collaborative exchanges as well as a growing desire to pursue emergent ideas common to both the words and music. Most surprising was the hierarchical

positioning of text and music. Unique to this piece is the multitude of ways this hierarchy can change depending on the goals of the performers. For one group of performers, a section might emphasize a key moment in the storyline with less consideration given to the music, while another might direct the listener's attention toward an unfolding melody with less emphasis on the text. For another group of performers, the opposite might be true. For yet another group, text and music might take on a contrapuntal character that focuses on equality.

2.6 THE MYSTERIES OF JACOB

for narrator and clarinet

2.6.1 BACKGROUND

The Mysteries of Jacob is a ten-minute piece for clarinet and narrator adapted from Jonathan Dubow's full-length play of the same name. Based on his personal experiences as a facilitator[75], this provocative and experimental play explores the relationship between a severely autistic teenager and his aide. Jacob, a large, cumbersome, physically handicapped boy, lost his ability to speak at an early age. He relies on the assistance of his aide to support his arm as he types on his Lightwriter, a text-to-speech device that helps him to communicate. This procedure is considered controversial for some people who argue that the facilitator often determines speech outcomes. The premise of the play is Jacob's frustration over his inability to express himself and his aide's interpretation of what his expressions might be. If there is a plot in the play, it is either the aide's emotional journey, or in the bond that they struggle to forge throughout their year together.

The process of shaping this work into a performable piece began as a collaborative effort between Dubow, Sophie Wingland, the narrator, and myself. We strove to condense

[75] A speech and language pathologist who aids in the use of facilitated communication.

the text into ten minutes while avoiding the feeling that it was an abbreviated version of a longer work. In the original play, there were a number of subplots including Jacob's accusations that his mother was sexually abusive, the appearances of the Book and Bard characters who serve as metaphors for language, and the early stages of Jacob's and the aide's developing relationship. The adapted version of this work makes no reference to these subplots for the sake of narrative concision, focusing instead on a series of exchanges between Jacob and his aide. Consequently, the piece is a multifaceted character study that magnifies the intricacies, intensity and complexity of Jacob's character.

2.6.2 THE INTERSECTION OF TEXT AND MUSIC

The beginning of the piece grapples with the idea that Jacob's emotions and his expressions of them are separate. As the aide explains, "The most important thing to know about Jacob is that his mind is isolated from his body." In the first episode, I sought to detach the statement of emotion from the emotion itself; the narrator speaks the words while the clarinet extrapolates their meaning. For example, the first recited lines read, "Every other second Great Affliction. Lucky never sit with this. What makes them lucky." (The "Great Affliction" refers to Jacob's disability.) The accompanying clarinet music attempts to express the shame overtaking Jacob. This is, of course, subjective as the music portrays only *my* understanding of this emotional state. While it was certainly crucial for the performance of the text to highlight this emotive dislocation, Wingland could not adopt a computerized voice. As she pointed out, she was not depicting the Lightwriter nor was she acting the part of a disabled person. She was speaking their words and, therefore, a more natural delivery would elucidate the peculiarities of the text.

Certain words of Jacob's are explicitly depicted through text painting. Some musical fragments examine the meanings of these words in a pictorial sense **(examples 22a-b)** while

others are illustrated by the physical demands required of the clarinetist to produce specific sounds **(examples 23a-b)**. In other places, an adherence to speech rhythms helped to generate a heightened sense of drama in specific musical passages **(examples 24a-b)**.

Example 22a | pictorial text painting

Example 22b | pictorial text painting

Example 23a | physical text painting

Example 23b | physical text painting

Example 24a | employing speech rhythms

What is wrong with you to - day?

Example 24b | employing speech rhythms

Jacob, what is true.

An important compositional approach employed in *The Mysteries of Jacob* is the use of direct opposition. For example, the aide makes a statement that concludes with the phrase, "rendering them silent." This line is followed by an entire musical episode in which Jacob attempts to produce the sound "buh" (episode 3, pg. 2). In a similar fashion, the word "eternity" is musically illustrated by a sound that ends abruptly **(example 25)**, as though it never began.

Example 25 | musical/textual opposition

like e - ter - ni - ty.

2.6.3 SUSPENDING NONLINEAR TIME

According to Dubow, Jacob's character does not perceive time in the way that we do. For him, all time is experienced simultaneously as if it were a memory; two hours ago and two years from now are equally eternal. Dubow illustrates this in the play by repeating words such as *anciently*, *eternity*, *festering* and *clenched* – words that to Jacob possess alternative meanings. In this way, he shows that while Jacob is capable of deep emotion, he exists altogether outside of time.

Many pieces I had composed before this one were based on the assumption that the very definition of narrative is unchangeable as the succession of exposition, development and *dénouement*. Even those who have scrutinized the integrity of this model or attempted to translate it into musical terms agree that the fundamental constituent of narrative is time.[76] As I came to know Jacob's character, I found myself observing narrative time the way that he would – out of order and all at once. If Dubow could manipulate a sequence of events and psychological states into a vertical space, could I distill these elements in music – a temporally dependent idiom – in order to accurately portray Jacob?

The suspension or distillation of time in this piece could be represented by the versatility of the narrator and clarinet roles. However, this was deliberately addressed in other ways. The clarinet often has music that preemptively or retrospectively exemplifies ideas that are expressed by the narrator. An example of this occurs in the second interlude (ep. 4, pg. 4) While the music is at first characterized by an irregular pulsing, it gradually ascends, unraveling a series of freely flowing motives. It is not until the narrator in the

[76] In a theory that attempts to strip from literature the supposedly essential factors of text, narrator, causality and referentiality, Byron Almén proposes the following definition of musical narrative: "the process through which the listener perceives and tracks a culturally significant transvaluation of hierarchical relationships within a temporal span." [Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 12.]

following episode says, “Aide closes his pulse to Jacob,” that one realizes that the defining feature of the previous music was the presence of a constant pulse however irregular.

The design of the piece also serves to emphasize a nonlinear understanding of time. There are two episodes (3 and 8) that integrate the words and music metrically (ep. 3 [pg. 3] as percussive counterpoint; ep. 8 [pg. 6] as a stress on “word(s)”) while the others engage more intuitively. There is no uniform procedure that I used to generate pitches. Some of the episodes were freely composed (3 and 8), while others relied substantially on motivic development (1 and parts of 5). In episode 5 (pg. 4), I used a random sequence generator to produce a series of intervals from the first episode that were to appear at structurally significant moments. This is a technique that helped Dubow deconstruct Jacob’s lines from a previously coherent form into their final state. Unfortunately, I had to rearrange some of the intervals so that the music would flow properly. My choice to compose the piece in this way was as much a product of free thought as it was a tool to demonstrate that the process itself reveals nothing about Jacob’s narrative. Instead, it requires the listener/observer to take each episode as is and to take Jacob as he is.

2.6.4 CONCLUSIONS

There are many different types of tension at play in this piece as evidenced by the revolving roles of the narrator and clarinet. The dynamic that occurs between the words and music is an outcome of the text’s intrinsic ambiguities, as well as my own insecurities throughout the compositional process. I often felt that I was misunderstanding my own thoughts about my piece in the way that Jacob is misunderstood. I wondered if the musical choices I made misrepresented my own piece. I tried to acknowledge this uncertainty at the end when the narrator asks, “What does it take to understand Jacob?” I realized that the idea of *mystery* could only be fortified by an effort to seek solace in that question, and the music

that follows tries to show this. If the piece remains incomprehensible and the task of understanding Jacob, perplexing, then I have at least attempted to answer my own questions. As Dubow says in the play,

> For poetry was all written before time was and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word, or a verse, and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. (Dubow, 2013, 27)

2.7 BEAUTIFUL SCHOOL
for soprano and piano

2.7.1 GOALS

Beautiful School, a cycle of three songs for soprano and piano and an ongoing project between 2012 and 2014, draws on the results of pieces involving narrative in absolute music as well as traditional and untraditional methods of text setting. The piece, which sets three experimental sonnets by New England poet Michael Schiavo, investigates the sonic values of words. The guiding enquiry behind this project is rooted in the perception of words as sounds, not as catalysts for meaning. This has led me to ask the following questions: 1) How can the composer direct the listener's attention away from the semantic value of a text toward its sonic surface. 2) Can the sonic properties of a text facilitate musical meaning and if so, how? The three Schiavo poems that are used in this piece are below:

SCENE

horses
low field

tree
sky

house
fence

bare
tree

bare tree
gray

green
tree

blue
blue

sky
green

horse
field
low
green
tree
sky

fence
house

horse
blue

sky
green

FUCKING ALWAYS SUNDAY

morning
adorn

broken
been

yellow
no

wet
where

next
there

may or
may not

light
honey

shit
glory

graffiti
church

possum
confetti

holy
jasmine

spelunk
profane

sacred
sidewalk

weird
birch

SONG

I
know

God
not sky

or grass
red

leaf
gas or

liquid
star

solid
fire

air
deity

water
felicities

nothing
ain't nothing

blue
rose

true
more

is more
& more

goes
& go

say
don't suppose

(Schiavo 2009, 2-4)

2.7.2 WORDS AS SOUNDS: REDIRECTING THE LISTENER'S ATTENTION

The linguistic study of words and speech is most often categorized according to syntax and semantics.[77] For the composer wishing to set a text, however, an important linguistic parameter to be considered is sound. A phonological analysis of words can be broken down into eight components: rhythm, meter, duration, intonation, contour, pitch height, stress and prolongation (the recurrence of sounds).[78] Take, for example, the first quatrain from Robert Frost's sonnet "A Dream Pang:"

[77] James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations Between Poetry and Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), x.
[78] John Halle and Fred Lerdahl, "A Generative Textsetting Model," *Current Musicology* 55 (1993): 3-9.

I had withdrawn in forest, and my song
Was swallowed up in leaves that blew away,
And to the forest edge you came one day
(This was my dream) and looked and pondered long[…][79]

If a basic rhythmic value were assigned to each syllable in this excerpt, the result would be a sequence of straight eighth notes. (See **example 26**.) However, this fails to take into account the organizational capabilities of parameters such as stress, duration and meter that are inherent in the nuances of language. Certain words obviously carry more weight than others. For example, words like "with***drawn***," "***swa***llowed" and "a***way***" would never be pronounced as "***with***drawn," "swa***llowed***" or "***a***way." Bearing this in mind, words with natural stress points are often (but not always) spoken with longer durational values, emphasizing their role as clitic[80] hosts in a phonological structure. **Examples 27a-b** provide more accurate rhythmic transcriptions of the words "withdrawn" and "away."

In comparison, other words including "swallowed," which also functions as a clitic host, are often spoken in such close combination with surrounding words so as to be perceived as a hyper-unit (also known as a clitic group). In many cases, the sonic result is a speeding up of rhythms, which is shown in **example 28**. When applied in full to the text and compared with **example 26**, a more natural metrical structure begins to emerge, allowing for the logical placement of time signatures and bar lines. (See **example 29**.)

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[79] Robert Frost, "A Dream Pang," in *Early Poems*, ed. by Robert Faggen (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 21.
[80] Clitics possess syntactic characteristics of single words, "but[…]they are "dependent," in some way or another, on adjacent words." [Joel A. Nevis, Brian D. Joseph, Dieter Wanner and Arnold M. Zwicky, *Clitics: A Comprehensive Bibliography 1892-1991* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), xii.]

Example 26 | Frost, "A Dream Pang," basic syllabic transcription of text

I had with - drawn in for - est, and my song

Was swal - lowed up in leaves that blew a - way

And to the for - est edge you came one day

(This was my dream) and looked and pon - dered long

Example 27a | Frost, "A Dream Pang," clitic host/longer durational value

with - drawn

Example 27b | Frost, "A Dream Pang," clitic host/longer durational value

a - way

Example 28 | Frost, "A Dream Pang," clitic group/accelerated rhythms

Was swal-lowed up in leaves

Example 29 | Frost, “A Dream Pang,” transcription of natural speech rhythms

I had with - drawn in for - est and my song Was swal - lowed up in

leaves that blew a - way, And to the for - est edge you came one

day (This was my dream) and looked and pon - dered long

Any analysis of meter and stress requires a discussion of pitch height, contour and intonation. Words that are stressed are often identified as attack points because greater force is required to produce them, consequently raising the pitch. A higher pitch, however, is perceived only in relation to those pitches around it that sound lower and vice versa. For example, the “for-” syllable in “forest” sounds high when juxtaposed with “-est,” but low in comparison to the syllable “-drawn” from “withdrawn,” which appears just before it. These mechanisms are largely dependent on the context and order in which words appear. That is, certain groupings of high and low pitches may, in fact, contradict the intention of the text. For instance, if one were to emphasize the word “blew,” it would be implied that previously, the narrator’s “song was swallowed up in leaves that,” perhaps, walked or scurried “away.” Similarly, if one were to speak the line, “And to the forest edge you came one day” with a rising inflection, it might suggest a question. These characteristics have the potential to lend any number of intonational phrase combinations, and therefore entire texts, a distinct and unusual shape. **Example 30** illustrates my interpretation of the pitch shape and contour of the Frost excerpt.

Example 30 | Frost, "A Dream Pang," pitch shape/contour

I had with - drawn in for - est And my song was swal-lowed up in

leaves that blew a - way, And to the for - est edge you came one

day (This was my dream) and looked and pon - dered long

This process of reducing words to sounds is, for the most part, only practical when a text conforms to syntactic norms – or when a hierarchy consisting of content words and function words is in place. Faced with this dilemma, many poets and composers alike have pursued unconventional methods of capturing the sonic properties of language. Sound poets Kurt Schwitters and Christian Bök have created poems entirely of decontextualized phonemes and vocal sounds as heard in *Ursonate*[81] and *A Cyborg Opera*.[82] In *Gesang der Jünglinge*,[83] Stockhausen was interested in exploring the transference of vocally produced phonemes to electronically-generated sounds. Berio uses the acoustic properties of the voice and three instruments to find a middle ground between the sounds of words and their meanings in his piece *Circles*, which sets three e.e. cummings poems, "Stinging," "Riverly is a Flower" and "N(o)w." Among countless other examples, Ligeti is at the far end of the spectrum in his examination of nonsense. Of the second movement, "Táncdal/Dance

[81] Kurt Schwitters, *Ursonate*, Eberhard Blum, Wergo WER 6304, 1992, CD.
[82] Christian Bök, *The Cyborg Opera: Synth Loops*, YouTube, accessed May 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alTdbe1GCnQ.
[83] Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Gesang der Jüngelinge*, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Stockhausen-Verlag 003, 2001, CD.

Song," in *Sippal, Dobbal, Nádihegeduvel*,[84] the composer writes, "The text[…]may sound meaningful, but actually the words are imaginary, having only rhythm and no meaning."[85]

My song cycle *Beautiful School* naturally focuses on the sounds of words. Because Schiavo's poems conform neither to traditional syntactic nor traditional semantic structures, many of the phonological parameters discussed in this subchapter are irrelevant. The poems present varying degrees of rhythmic and intonational limitation, particularly in the first two poems. With such poetic emphasis placed on words like "tree," "horse," "field," "blue" and "sky," the musical possibilities for any form of phrasal contour are minimal. In **example 31**, I have transcribed the speech rhythms and relative pitch heights of the first four stanzas from "Scene" to demonstrate how unwieldy and uninteresting a conventional text setting that abides by the aural results of common rhetoric would be. However, as John Halle and Fred Lerdahl point out, composers who choose to seek out unusual methods of text setting are often drawn to those "options that contradict basic impulses…precisely because they are violations and hence are striking and unexpected."[86] *Beautiful School* makes use of this idea in several different ways.

On a basic level, this can be seen in the accentuation of the word "horses" at the opening of "Scene." While I have done little to elaborate on the internal structures of individual words throughout the piece, syllabic stress is counterintuitively placed in the second iteration of this word to refocus the listener's attention on its sound. **Example 32**, illustrates how the subordinate syllable, "-ses" is reinterpreted as the accented syllable by virtue of its placement on the downbeat. Initially, this technique was meant for use on other polysyllabic words as well, such as "morning," "adorn," "yellow" and "liquid." It quickly

[84] Györgi Ligeti, *Sippal, Dobbal, Nádihegeduvel* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2000).
[85] Györgi Ligeti trans. by Louise Duchesneau, liner notes to *The Ligeti Project III*, Katalin Károlyi and Amadinda Percussion Group. Teledec Classics 8573-87631-2. CD. 2001.
[86] Halle and Lerdahl, 9.

became apparent, however, that it was a fairly rudimentary approach to a problem that had numerous creative solutions, and that overuse would tax the listener's patience and detract from the natural peculiarities of the text.

Example 31 | "Scene," speech rhythms of first four stanzas

Example 32 | "Scene," stress on second syllable of "horses"

One outcome involved a shift away from single words toward groupings of words. Assuming hypothetically that Schiavo's texts did follow basic linguistic principles, these groupings might be identified as micro-intonational phrase units. Examples include "bare tree," "light/honey" and "solid/fire" – in other words, linguistic combinations that communicate an intelligible idea and have a definite phrasal inflection. Similar to the accentuation of certain 'incorrect' syllables in polysyllabic words, this strategy places emphasis on 'incorrect' words within two-word groupings. For example, "low field" would normally be spoken quite rhythmically with more intensity on "low," resulting in a slightly higher pitch. "Field," however, is stressed in the musical setting of this text by a melismatic

oscillation between high and low pitches and a rhythmic prolongation of a single syllable. (See **example 33**.) Similarly, with the addition of punctuation, the lines "yellow/no/wet" (or "yellow, no, wet!") might be spoken with more weight given to "wet" as a correction to "yellow." As seen in **example 34**, I have chosen to accent "no" both in articulation and pitch placement to highlight the rhyme between "-llow" and "no."

Example 33 | "Fucking Always Sunday," monosyllabic prolongation

Example 34 | "Fucking Always Sunday," highlighting rhyme

The listener's attention is further directed toward the sounds of words through truncation and repetition. The best examples of this are two short 'fantasies' that occur on the words "yellow" and "glory" beginning in mm. 9 and 57, respectively, in "Fucking Always Sunday." In both instances, just enough consonants are omitted from each syllabic repetition to obscure the actual words for a moment. When first heard, for example, "ellow" might belong to "fellow," "mellow" or "bellow" instead of "yellow." Likewise, "-ory" in "glory" might be part of "story," "hoary" or, if you are Canadian, "sorry." This ambiguity achieved

through repetition allowed these phonetic shapes to be thought of as catalysts for word-segments to become vocal colors, dissolving any semblance of meaning that the listener might attempt to create. Furthermore, through the repetition of these syllables, it became quite easy to write quick, virtuosic music that encouraged the listener to focus on the agility of the performer and the unique timbral qualities of her voice. In an article entitled "Compositional Control of Phonetic/Nonphonetic Perception,"[87] David Evan Jones affirms this direction by citing the opening of Steve Reich's piece, *Come Out*, as a classic example of music that deconstructs language in order to construct new timbral fields. While my songs are quite different, much of what Jones says about repetition and the division and deconstruction of perceived sonic units is relevant:

> Even a single immediate *exact* repetition objectifies a recorded word or phrase by announcing, in effect, that the exactly repeated verbalization, with its associated rate and rhythm of delivery, intonation contour, and voice quality, is itself a *unit* – a "building block" which can be repeated and divided – rather than simply a single instance of an infinitely flexible discourse. After one or more presentations, listeners have absorbed any morphemic and syntactic information in the signal and are left to listen to the speech sound in the remaining repetitions. If the repeated pitch segment is short enough and is repeated for long enough, the listener will involuntarily "deconstruct" the text into its acoustically related elements. (Jones 1987, 146)

2.7.3 CREATING MUSICAL MEANING

Important to the objectification of language is understanding the forms that ultimately organize words. Schiavo identifies his poems as sonnets (an octave followed by a sestet with a volta (turn) typically appearing in the ninth line), though not in the traditional Petrarchan (abba, abba, cdd, cde or cdc, cdc) or Elizabethan (abab, cdcd, efef, gg) forms. In a lengthy email correspondence, Schiavo explained the genesis of his new approach as a way

[87] David Evan Jones, "Compositional Control of Phonetic/Nonphonetic Perception," in *Perspectives of New Music* 25 no. 1/2 (1987).

of "taking [an] assured form [and] moving all other elements (rhyme scheme, volta, meter) around…"[88] and then "unpacking"[89] each line so that only the bare essentials remained.

Schiavo's *Beautiful School* poems can be viewed in two ways – either as fourteen couplets, which are likened to the fourteen lines appearing in traditional sonnets or as double sonnets with each word forming the full twenty-eight-line structure. Couplets or couplings play an important role in the design of these poems. In the poet's words, "the couplet [represents] a pair of lovers, or yin-yang, though not necessarily opposites – simply pairings of ideas – complimentary, rude, but always pleasing (I hope) – in this case a word or a phrase."[90] On a large scale, "Scene" and "Song" can be interpreted as companions to one another with common language such as "sky," "grass" and "blue." The couplet feature, however, is most explicitly articulated in the poem "Fucking Always Sunday." Drawn entirely from unpacking pre-composed or pre-existing sonnets by other authors, Schiavo reassembled each couplet to reflect a new poetic vision. The poet explains this approach:

> Andy Hughes once complained that our friend Jason Meyers seemed to be taking poems we all exchanged and just re-writing them with his own spin, using others' work as a basis. Well, that's what poets do; that's what all artists do. We take, rename, rearrange. To prove my point, I took a poem of each of theirs, found pairs of words that rhyme fairly close to one another, and converted them into this sonnet form. (Schiavo 2012, email message)

What Schiavo considers a rhyme is really a commonality. For example, links between words can be found through similar sounds ("m**orn**ing/ad**orn**"), similar concepts ("light/honey"), antithesis ("may or/may not") and contextual commentary (perhaps "spelunk" sounds "profane"). In this sense, the words in this poem cannot be understood as discrete entities separate from the words that surround them.

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[88] Michael Schiavo, email message to Elizabeth Ogonek, October 30, 2012.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

In comparison, “Scene” highlights, more than the other poems, the presence of the double sonnet. This is most noticeable in the seventh stanza, “blue/blue,” which functions as a pivot point between the first and second sonnets. The structural importance of these two lines is not only reinforced by repetition but also by their placement within the poem. If one were to divide it into two sets of fourteen lines, “blue/blue” would be the final couplet in the first set. In my opinion, this device could have more assertively punctuated the double sonnet by eliding the seventh and eighth stanzas so that “blue” appears at the end of the first sonnet as well as the beginning of the second. Nevertheless, the seventh stanza still alludes to a cadential gesture not seen in either of the other two poems.

In a poem that makes tremendously economical use of language by recycling words, another characteristic that highlights the double sonnet quality includes the transition from multiple “horses” in the first sonnet to a single “horse” in the second sonnet. Schiavo re-contextualizes certain words that in the first sonnet later on in the second sonnet. For example, the first stanza, “horses/low field,” can be seen in an expanded form in stanzas nine and ten: “horse/field/low/green.” Similarly, the “blue” from the seventh stanza (“blue/blue”) reappears towards the end of the second sonnet as “horse/blue.” The poet notes that the motivation behind these textual adjustments was narratively driven:

> The effect I wanted to achieve (though I’m not sure I did) was to write a poem that pulls the reader’s mind out horizontally and vertically at the same time making a sphere. At first the scene is slow, perhaps the viewer scanning from side to side, but then diagonals, all sorts of angles start to come in and things speed up and start swapping places with one another. I wanted the first half of the sonnet to be, well, not a typical New England scene, but at least have the trappings of one. Then I wanted reality and imagination to start to combine. (Schiavo 2012, email message)

Schiavo’s structural approach to his poetry exposes his compositional process while also revealing that his choice of language and lack of syntax is far less arbitrary than it seems on the surface. However, my own analysis of these poems suggests that in the absence of the

poet's explanation, they remain entirely abstract with only their description as sonnets pointing to any concrete meaning. The discrepancy between process and product – the resulting arbitrariness – is exactly what drew me to compose *Beautiful School*. Stravinsky describes a similar affinity for such values in his *Diaries and a Dialogue*: "The real subject of *Apollo*, however, is versification, which implies something arbitrary and artificial to most people, though to me art is arbitrary and must be artificial."[91] Peter Dayan, in his book *Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, from Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond*,[92] further explains this claim by stating that these qualities

> apply to music; they apply to poetry; and they apply most clearly and necessarily of all to the links between music and poetry. Those links must remain arbitrary and artificial, never rational or natural. That is how they can defend both arts against any attempt at explanation in words. (Dayan 2011, 122)

Stravinsky takes advantage of rhythm, meter, stress, qualities that "most people"[93] identify as arbitrary, allowing them to become conduits for purely musical decisions. Of *Oedipus Rex*, Stravinsky states, "my scansion [of Latin] is entirely unorthodox. It must break every rule, if only because Latin is a language of fixed accents and I accentuate freely according to my musical dictates."[94] More specifically, he explains, "where Sophocles has used what may be called a 3/8 rhythm, I have used the 6/8, and…just as his chorus sings of the gods in 4/4 dactyls, my Créon, who is on the side of the gods, sings in the same metre."[95]

By comparison, my approach to arbitrariness and artificiality in the *Beautiful School* songs takes its cues from the tone and character of the texts. Schiavo's aim to obscure their formal and poetic origin and amplify their innate intangibility led me to invent musical meaning that I imagined could take the place of poetic meaning. As explained in the

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[91] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 33.
[92] Peter Dayan, *Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, from Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).
[93] Stravinsky and Craft, 33.
[94] Ibid., 31.
[95] Ibid., 28-29.

previous subchapter, this, of course, emerges in part through the objectification of language – or the treatment of words as purely sound objects – but also through the development of these resulting motives into larger forms and departures into new areas that can only be justified in musical terms.

While the rhythms and intonation of Schiavo's poetry are largely responsible for the motivic material present throughout this work, I envisioned *Beautiful School* as a set of three etudes that investigated areas of both vocal and compositional concern. Written for Sophie Wingland, a soprano whose voice I had come to know very well through many years of collaboration, these songs were focused on aspects of her voice that had become more pronounced as it matured. These changes included greater ease and flexibility in the passaggio (F5-G5), a fuller middle voice (G4-E5), and the development of a lower extension (C4 down to G3) that has substantial fullness and volume. In addition, each song also addressed specific technical issues in my compositional practice that frequently arise when writing vocal music. Particularly important for this set of songs was making efficient use of musical material that was derived from Schiavo's poetry, creating a sense of independence between the vocal and piano parts, equality in virtuosity, establishing dynamic contrasts between songs so as to show off different vocal characteristics and the text-setting of inherently non-musical language. Each song in the set has a specific musical objective that strives to incorporate these various criteria.

Somewhat like a pearl necklace where the individual pearls are held together almost invisibly by a thin chain creating the illusion that they are a single object, the first song, "Scene," examines the unorthodox use of punctuated events to create long lines. Characteristic of this poem is the immense physicality of its language. This is evident as a result of monosyllabic words such as "fence" and "field," which have a clear, hard emphasis

on the first consonant sound, as well as words that possess bright vowel sounds, including "green" and "blue." While these textual attributes are certainly at the core of the vocal part, they are reinforced in the piano by different moments of attack. In particular, these include the opening chordal music (mm. 1-15), the accelerating, repeated-note gesture (mm. 12-13), and the triadic music (mm. 33-35), which combines multiple articulations.

Lines between events such as those just described are achieved in a variety of ways throughout this song. At the outset (mm. 1-15), continuity between chordal attack points is maintained by sustaining the last sounding sonority. Though there is a clear correlation between attack and decay, the held chords are meant to acquire more or less density in relation to the phrase lengths. By comparison, the harmonic nature of the music beginning at m. 33 *should* lend itself to the momentum of a line as it is briefly rooted in A minor. However, the increasing non-functionality of the tertian harmony appearing between mm. 33-35 renders the illusion of harmonic directionality irrelevant. Instead, movement/line occurs as a result of the contrary motion between hands in the piano part (mm. 33-38) as well as the ascending melodic material in the vocal part (mm. 33-37). Important to both the piano and the voice is the use of repetition as a tool not only for prolonging material but gradually altering specific musical parameters so as to give the impression that a line is unfolding. Repeated figures occur in a number of capacities including single notes, motives, rhythms, chord progressions, and formal sections.

Most challenging of all was creating long vocal lines using text that normally requires short rhythmic values. One solution to this problem was to employ melismas on monosyllabic words. This is found in many places throughout the song, initially appearing with relative prominence on the word "low" in m. 15. (See **example 2.7.8**.) Another pertinent solution was to embrace unattractive vowel sounds by sustaining them for longer

durations (see the word "field" in **example 33**) or to repeat them several times (**example 35**) rather than shying away from their natural timbre by composing short, detached material. By accepting these sounds as valid vocal music, I was not only able to challenge the soprano's technical facility, but a variety of contrasting colors were discovered by using similar sounds in different registers of the voice. As an example, the sound "ee" can be heard in the low/middle register in mm. 15-16 on the word "field," in the middle register on mm. 33-35 on the word "green," and in the high register in m. 36 on the word "tree." The contrast in colors means that the words range from a relatively natural pronunciation to one of complete distortion. The purity of the word, therefore, becomes muted, emphasizing a shift away from linguistic meaning toward musical meaning.

Example 35 | "Scene," "green" repeated

Up until this point, much of my limited vocal output (with the exception of "Saba Ventus" from *Three Biographies*) has been an exploration of the lyrical, sustained aspects of the voice. As a result, the second song in this set, "Fucking Always Sunday," examines different ways in which fast-paced, agile vocal music can be effective while making efficient use of the performers' capabilities. Essential to this objective was seeking out words that could be easily fragmented and repeated in order to create a sense of musical momentum. The song hinges on two main sections that center on the words "yellow" (mm. 9-29) and

"glory" (mm. 57-77), respectively. These words were chosen as the cornerstone of this song for the semantic ambiguity that arises from fragmentation (see the end of chapter 2.7.3) but most importantly, for their similar syllabic and intonational structures and their resulting rhythmic profiles. The latter two qualities are crucial to the underlying investigation in this song. True to the rhythms of the words, the scotch snap (beginning in m. 9 in the vocal part) can be thought of as the primary motive from which all other rhythmic ideas are derived. The strength of the scotch snap's downbeat inspired a juxtaposition of emphases on downbeats and off beats. Initially appearing on the last eighth note of m. 10 and sporadically reappearing throughout this section, this mixture of accents returns with "glory" in m. 57 with the emphasis falling, at first, on the sixteenth note D and then on the eighth note E. Gathering rhythmic intensity, an embellished version of the scotch snap figure emerges as groupings of sixteenth notes which are introduced in the vocal part in mm. 10, 12 and 13 and returning in an extended form in m. 17.

Changes of register and harmony are also used as a rhythmic device meant to generate a feeling of quickening. In the passage between mm. 9-13, for example, there is a clear sense of stability in the first three bars. This is made evident by the limited range of pitches used in the voice (F4-D5), the repetition of F4 and G4, the diatonicism to F, and the reinforcement of F as a tonal center in the bass. The last two bars of this passage, however, become increasingly less stable. The vocal line ventures out of the low/middle register, arriving via stepwise motion on Ab5 by way of an A diminished chord, while the left hand of the piano, moving in contrary motion to the right hand and the voice, outlines a descending whole tone scale beginning on D and arriving on Gb. The overall effect of this passage and many others like it (mm. 15-22, mm. 22-29, mm. 57-65, mm. 66-77) is one of acceleration with the impetus behind this motion coming toward the end of phrases.

Early on in the compositional process, I came to the understanding that musical drive could not solely be accomplished by composing long passages filled with active rhythmic language. This approach would not only have been physically taxing for the singer, but as a result, I knew that the music would have had a tendency to slow down. My solution to this problem was to explore the ideas of dialogue and interplay as an agent for dynamism. Appearing in a range of capacities throughout the song, dialogic interaction is first observed in the sharing of material by the voice and piano. An example of this occurs in mm. 19-20 with the singer performing the first arpeggiated A diminished chord and the piano performing the second. Originally, both figures were to be sung. However, the singer suggested dividing them up so as to maintain the momentum while highlighting equality among parts. Also present between the voice and piano are frequent role changes. Where the voice might be in the melodic foreground with the majority of moving lines in one section (mm. 9-29), those become the piano's responsibility in the next section (mm. 30-33) with the vocal part supporting the harmony. Finally, there is a relationship between larger sections which closely resembles a dialogue. Each fast section of music (mm. 9-36, mm. 57-89) is preceded by a slower section (mm. 1-8, mm. 37-56). This allows for easier performability and for the unique characteristics of the fast music to stand out.

By comparison to the previous two songs, the third song, "Song," for solo soprano, focuses less on issues of compositional technique and more on strengthening and underscoring certain areas of the soprano's voice. At the time the song was written, many aspects of Wingland's voice were newly developed. Composers who had written for her before frequently exploited her freakishly high register for her unusual dexterity and exceptional intonation above the staff. To me, however, her voice has always been most expressive and nuanced in the middle register. As her voice changed, this became more

pronounced with the sound in that region gaining robustness, power and clarity. I aimed to expose these qualities while challenging Wingland to continue building a supported sound by composing music that lingers in a lower tessitura and makes use of dramatic, dynamic contrasts. **Example 36** illustrates this practice. While the low, middle and high registers of Wingland's voice kept their unique sound qualities, an important thing to emerge from her vocal transition was an evenness throughout her voice. New to Wingland was a developing flexibility and timbral continuity around the passaggio. Previously, the most comfortable approach to this area (F5-G5) was by ascending, stepwise motion. Leaps proved to be problematic as they over-emphasized her discomfort on these three pitches. As can be observed in "Song," every arrival to a note located within the passaggio is approached by either ascending or descending leaps. An example can be seen below (**example 37**). Wingland credits her now effortless sound in that region to this work.

Example 36 | "Song," lower tessitura

Example 37 | "Song," passaggio approached by leap

2.7.4 CONCLUSIONS

One temptation brought on by Schiavo's poetry is to superimpose meaning that perhaps is not there. As I began sketching this set of songs, I found myself doing this: attempting to ascribe meaning to linguistic patterns that were utterly meaningless to me and seemingly irrelevant to my experiences. *Beautiful School*, the songs, are my answer to this confusion. The challenge became to redefine my understanding of implicit and explicit significance to be broader than language, and ultimately, to be inclusive of all modes of communication, music in particular. No longer tethered by the constraints of text, this new found autonomy influenced the relationship between the words and music as well as the relationship between the voice and the piano. Musical decisions suddenly had the freedom to be made for musical reasons. As Dayan says of Stravinsky,

> To treat words musically is not to find any such correspondences between the two media; it is to create a relationship not of definable transferable qualities (such as similar rhythms), but of unfathomable identity. Stravinsky's music must never *imitate* any present poetry, in any sense we can pin down; it can only *be* poetry. (Dayan 2011, 122.)

2.8 THREE BIOGRAPHIES
for countertenor and cello

2.8.1 COLLABORATION AS CONCEPT

Three Biographies, written in 2014 for countertenor and cello, was the outcome of a collaboration with countertenor Albert Montañez and poet Ghazal Mosadeq. This piece was a final project for Guildhall's Voiceworks class in which composers and singers are paired with writers from Birkbeck College and tasked with creating a joint piece. Voiceworks is an unusual meeting point for composers, singers, and writers that seeks to revitalize and reinvent the tradition of collaboration. At the core of the class are two objectives: 1) to explore the meaning of song in the 21st century as an evolving genre rather than as a

historical form and 2) to encourage each group to develop their own mode of collaboration by exchanging ideas about creative process, content, tradition and aesthetics.

As a student at the University of Southern California, I took a class much like Voiceworks. While it was a wonderful introduction to collaboration, the class was problematic in that every group had an imbalance in responsibility and creative contribution. The singers, who were responsible for delivering the final performance, were excluded from conversations between the writers and the composers, while many of the writers were intent on providing existing work for the composers to set in their pieces. As a result, many collaborations often failed because certain values, including creative independence, dialogue, and ownership of the project were neglected.

Michael P. Farrell, in his book *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work*,[96] provides the following definition for creative partnerships:

> A collaborative circle is a primary group consisting of peers who share similar occupational goals and who, through long periods of dialogue and collaboration, negotiate a common vision that guides their work. The vision consists of a shared set of assumptions about their discipline, including what constitutes good work, how to work, what subjects are worth working on, and how to think about them…For members of the collaborative circle, each person's work is an expression of the circle's shared vision filtered through his or her own personality. (Farrell 2001, 11-12)

Voiceworks was an opportunity to address the issues that had surfaced at USC by redefining collaboration as an organic, cooperative and equal partnership. In line with Farrell's definition, this placed an emphasis on collaboration at the generative level in which each artist contributed something new, taking into account the skills, interests, and ideas of the other partners. The hope was that this would allow the vision of the project to arise naturally

[96] Michael P. Farrell, *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

from our combined efforts, and that text, music and vocality would be thought of as equally important.

Our collaboration did not work out as we intended. Though we shared a belief in equal responsibility, dialogue, compromise and collective problem-solving, our work together failed to uphold these values. The following subchapters explain in detail the shortcomings and successes of collaboration in this project and how the process of working together influenced the compositional decisions that were made.

2.8.2 COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE

Three Biographies began as an idea for a set of miniature songs that would tell a series of short stories. The project immediately faced collaborative challenges. *Three Biographies*' text was to be written simultaneously with the music to allow the poetic ideas to develop in response to the music and vice versa. The texts were, ultimately, excerpted from a preexisting work. In an interview with Michelle Johnson in *World Literature Today*, American poet and librettist Dana Gioia makes the salient point that from a writer's perspective, "you usually have a very tangible sense of how your words will be used and experienced."[97] He continues by saying, "Writing a poem to be set to music opens different creative possibilities and responsibilities from one written for the page. There is also a give-and-take in the collaborative creative process as the work takes its final shape."[98] Though Mosadeq added new material to her prose poems, her creative process remained separate from the compositional process – voice and music were not necessarily a significant consideration.

In the poet's view, the completion of the text meant that her participation in the project was no longer needed. It was the composer's responsibility to alter a text should a

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[97] Michelle Johnson and Dana Gioia, "Poetic Collaborations: A Conversation with Dana Gioia," *World Literature Today* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2011): 31.
[98] Ibid.

series of musical decisions make any editing of the poems necessary. This required compositional solutions that made few modifications to the original language of the poems. In editing the texts, one presiding rule was that words could only be taken away – none could be added. This arose largely as a method of dealing with lengthy and cumbersome sentences that were ill suited to vocal setting because they resulted in unidiomatic, unwieldy musical phrases. The following is an example of a sentence from Mosadeq's original text to the third song, "Saba Ventus:" "Saba Ventus: she lives in Red Deer, Alberta, she lives in York, England, she lives in London, both Ontario and London London, and Krishnanagar, West Bangalshe, she lives in Trinidad and Tobago."[99]

A first attempt to set the text as it was originally written can been seen in **example 38**. As can be observed, this line presents major musical and technical dilemmas. There are few places to breathe that do not disrupt the momentum and repetition that are characteristic of this style of writing. Consequently, the musical setting of this sentence rebels against the intention of the text. Rather than animating Venus' vivacity, which is crucial to her character, the musical verbosity of this phrase squeezes the breath out of the singer and, therefore, the life out of the idea. Furthermore, Mosadeq's original version of the text places a repetitive stress on the word "lives." In exclusively textual settings, this technique is often an effective way of drawing out musical parallels that may arise through the repetition of sounds. However, when such repeated words are set to music, a sense of resistance emerges that often highlights an unwanted dichotomous relationship between text and music. As a result, shorter sentences, smaller phrases and less repetition became necessary in order to lend the song greater forward motion. The following is an example of an amended version of the text: "Saba Ventus lives in Red Deer, Alberta. She lives in York,

[99] Ghazal Mosadeq, "Saba Ventus" in *Biographies* (Unpublished, 2014), 4.

England and in London, Ontario and London London. She lives in Trinidad and Tobago and in Grand Rapids, Michigan." **Example 39** demonstrates how these modified sentences were eventually set for the voice.

Example 38 | "Saba Ventus," vocal setting of original text

Sa - ba Ven - tus: she lives in Red Deer, Al - ber - ta, she lives in York Eng - land, she lives in Lon - don both On - tar - i - o and

Lon - don Lon - don, and in Krish - na - na - gar, West Ban - gal - she, she lives in Tri - ni - dad and To - ba - go.

Example 39 | "Saba Ventus," final setting of edited text

Sa - (a) - ba - (a) Ven - tus Sa - (a) - ba - (a) Ven - tus lives in Red Deer, Al -

ber - ta. She lives in York, Eng - land and in

Lon - don, On - tar - i - o and Lon - don Lon - don. She lives in Tri - ni - dad and To -

ba - go and in Grand Rap - ids, Mich - i - gan.

Mosadeq's ambivalence about her text provided compositional independence but it was also problematic. At one point, she was asked to revise "Saba Ventus" in order to better illuminate a narrative. The singer and I agreed that this was one characteristic that had the potential to tie the three stories together to make it a set. Our suggestion was met via email with the following response: "[T]here is no narrative in that except for she lives in so many

different places at the same time."[100] In many ways, the literary aspect of this collaborative process was no different than using an existing, published text and paring it down to suit the needs of another creative endeavor. This is, of course, a perfectly normal way to work and one that many composers do use. However, it drastically altered the tone of our work together, forcing us to reevaluate our collaborative goals.

Collaboration with the countertenor was similarly challenging but for different reasons. Unlike Mosadeq, Montañez was very involved. The early stages of our work together centered on the areas of his voice that he felt uncomfortable exposing. One compositional challenge was that his voice was at its most characteristic, both in range and articulation, within a small ambitus. While most countertenors have a smaller range than many of their soprano counterparts, his was exceptionally limited, reaching from C4 to G5. His upper passaggio was located between Bb4 and C5 and his lower passaggio between D4 and E4. It was difficult for him to maneuver through these notes, and he requested that the music written would avoid these areas. This placed a strict limit on the available pitches. What remained was the top portion of his range (C#5 to G5), which was predominantly loud, and his middle register, which was by far the most nuanced part of his voice. **Example 44b** represents a phrase that was rewritten to accommodate these technical issues. Below is shown an edited version. (See **example 40**).

Example 40 | "Lawrence Senkovic," edited opening passage

[100] Ghazal Mosadeq, email message to Elizabeth Ogonek, February 9, 2014.

It became evident that it would be difficult to write an effective and expressive piece if limited to only twelve notes. (Please see **example 41**.) This provided an opportunity to persuade Montañez that there were countless compositional solutions to these types of problems. Previous collaborations with other singers had taught me that the issue of passaggio is different for everyone. For some, an upper or lower approach makes singing in that area problematic; for others, lingering in their passaggio becomes tiring for their voices. Montañez, in particular, did not like the sound of the notes in these two locations, and he felt that he could not project them well. *Three Biographies* employs three techniques aimed at attaining a sound in these two areas that are both vocally and compositionally satisfying: 1) Notes are approached by an upper or lower neighbor note (no greater than a M2). 2) Notes are approached from below with a large interval such as a M6 or a m7. 3) Notes in the passaggio with no preceding material. **Examples 42a-c** demonstrate how these procedures were put to use in the final score.

Example 41 | Montañez's vocal range

middle register continuation
high register
middle register
low register (unreliable)
low passaggio
high passaggio

Example 42a | "James Bahkti," mm. 3-4

mp
p
3
5
One
One win - ter's af - ter -

Example 42b | "James Bahkti," mm. 26-28

26 *mp* was

Example 42c | "Saba Ventus," mm. 30-32

p She lives on the front page of the

What Montañez heard as a bad sound in his voice had the potential to be perceived as a unique vocal attribute that could be exploited to expand the color palette of the piece. This was certainly true of the pitches within his passaggio, but even truer of those that were outside of his traditional range. Though he had little experience singing below C4, for example, this unusual area in his voice had the ability to accentuate the meaning of this particular text when juxtaposed with pitches found in a more common tessitura. The second song, "Lawrence Senkovic," makes use of this lower extension, ranging from C4 down to F3. While this area of Montañez's voice was by no means ideal by operatic standards, its thinness and instability added a physical dimension to the main character that would have been impossible to achieve in a different register. This notion of physicality became integral to a deeper understanding of the text. In a song that questions the possibility of extinction, the discovery of this new sound color added a characteristically human quality to an otherwise conceptual idea. Roland Barthes refers to this marriage of text and vocality in his book *Image, Music, Text.*[101] In his examination of "the very precise space (genre) of *the encounter*

[101] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

between a language and a voice,"[102] he identifies these qualities as "the *grain*, the grain of the voice when the latter [the voice] is in a dual posture, a dual production – of language and music."[103] **Example 43** demonstrates how Montañez's extended range was used at the beginning of the second song to evoke a deranged lullaby.

Example 43 | "Lawrence Senkovic," mm. 3-6

The technical restrictions that arose through collaboration with Montañez were indeed creatively stimulating and led to many new ways of thinking about limited pitch material. However, the musical syntax of the piece could have been more expressive by the use of extended techniques, nontraditional vocal sounds, and new forms, had he been open to such challenges. In his view, the composer's role was to create music aligned with traditional 19th and early 20th century lieder/chanson/song (i.e. Schubert, Schumann, Debussy, Britten, Poulenc, etc.) so that these songs could act as a functional part of his audition repertoire. Though it remained a valuable opportunity, this minimized the scope of musical material with which I was left to experiment, resulting in a piece that was simple and direct.

The greatest shortcoming our project encountered was a failure to meet on common collaborative ground. The project unfolded much like a kitchen line in a restaurant: the poet wrote the text, I then set it to music, and it was later performed by the singer. Little effort was made to facilitate interaction between Mosadeq and Montañez. From a compositional

[102] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 181.
[103] Ibid.,

point of view, this fostered a pervasive feeling that ultimately, each of them could be interchangeable with other artists who fit similar descriptions. As a consequence, the collaborative effort itself was marginalized because greater priority was placed on the final outcome of the project than on the creative process.

2.8.3 CREATIVE AUTONOMY

While the collaborative aspect of *Three Biographies* was in one sense limiting, there was tremendous freedom to be found in the musical interpretation and realization of the text. The three poems that were eventually set in this piece took brief glimpses at the inner and outer lives of three characters. Bearing some resemblance to Fenéon, Mosadeq's affinity for brevity and gift for concise storytelling can be seen in this writing. Two of her three stories quickly and efficiently outline clear narrative progressions, while the third paints a portrait of a restless woman. Each of the texts can be seen below:

> JAMES BAHKTI
>
> One winter's afternoon, 1989, James Bahkti, then forty-two walked home to find his wife's farewell letter which he stopped reading after line five. He was not a reader anymore. He was a writer. He writes to deal with the fear of mortality. He hasn't put his pen down yet. We thank the medical support team for his superb fiction.
>
> LAWRENCE SENKOVIC
>
> Lawrence Senkovic, a writer and a scientist, a poet and a genius. Once, he ran into his own brother at a paleontology conference. But who runs into one's own brother at a paleontology conference? Except for those of us who have gone extinct.
>
> SABA VENTUS
>
> Saba Ventus lives in Red Deer, Alberta. She lives in York, England and in London, Ontario and London London. She lives in Trinidad and Tobago and in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She lives on the front page of the Paris Review, among lilies and pipelines and in the center of Chicago. She lives in Ahar with Agha Shahid Ali. And she lives fully in Kashmir and New Dehli. (Mosadeq ed. by Ogonek 2014, 3-4)

As a reaction to the *Three Biographies* collaboration and to the chosen texts, the piece evolved as a means of commenting upon an existing song tradition rather than as a mode for technical experimentation with musical techniques that had not been explored in my earlier pieces. The nature of Mosadeq's poems invited a musical heightening of certain textual characteristics for two reasons: 1) not doing so would reveal a disparity between poetic objectives and musical objectives and 2) it would provide an opportunity for the listener to arrive at more profound conclusions about stories that might otherwise be viewed as overly simplistic. One solution was to stratify different musical and textual parameters to create a perceivable hierarchy. In a discussion with David Shapiro about musical collaboration with dancers, John Cage notes that "in the thirties…modern dancers wanted to be first with respect to the music. They wanted the musician to be in a subservient position as far as the collaboration was concerned."[104] While in Cage's case, this observation was the outcome of collaboration and personality dynamics, in *Three Biographies*, hierarchy became a major compositional concern. Three elements – the voice, narrative role changes, and character development – can be thought of as in the foreground.

As the text and the singer were the central focus of the piece, all musical parameters such as pitch, rhythm, tempo and texture functioned supportively. Decisions that were made in the early stages of composition were aimed at ensuring that the vocal music remained the focus of the piece. For example, each song grew from a vocal line or a fragment of a vocal line that was written in advance of the cello music. While this was fundamentally a strategy to generate melodic material, it came to signify a particular narrative voice. **Examples 44a-c** are early unaccompanied realizations of excerpts from each song. From these examples, it is clear that any additional music would have been secondary to the vocal lines as they stand

[104] David Shapiro and John Cage, "On Collaboration in Art: A Conversation with David Shapiro," *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 10 (Autumn 1985): 103.

perfectly well on their own. In a situation where the cello was meant to play an equal role, vocal clarity, agility, and emphasis would have been easily compromised. The function of the cello, therefore, was to act in a supportive role to the singer, and to develop motivic and harmonic material directly related to music that appears in the vocal part. "Lawrence Senkovic" and "Saba Ventus" take a counterintuitive approach to the issue of hierarchy by creating the illusion that the two instruments are equal. **Examples 45a-b** illustrate how the voice and cello appear to play off each other although the vocal line was written first. Setting much of the text syllabically and repeating few words enabled this kind of exchange. What resulted was a highly rhythmic interpretation of the text, which in performance is not radically different from a dramatic reading.

Example 44a | "James Bahkti," unaccompanied vocal excerpt

♩ = ca. 69 rit. Suddenly, ♩ = ca. 84

James Bahk - ti, then for - ty two walked home to find his

wife's fare - well let - ter which he stopped read - ing af - ter line five.

Example 44b | "Lawrence Senkovic," unaccompanied vocal excerpt

Law - rence Senk - o - vic, a writ - er and a sci - en - tist, a

po - et and a gen - i - us.

Example 44c | "Saba Ventus," unaccompanied vocal excerpt

Example 45a | "Lawrence Senkovic," mm. 10-12

Example 45b | "Saba Ventus," mm. 22-25

Mosadeq's proclivity for small literary forms meant that every detail required a musical response, or the piece would fail to have the desired effect on its audience. Of particular importance were changes in the narrative voice such that these pivotal moments were echoed in the music to give breadth and dimension to each of the stories. "James Bahkti,"

which by all accounts is a tragic tale, ends on a questionably humorous note with the following statement: "We thank the medical support team for his superb fiction." To mark this change in tone, the singer is asked to speak this sentence, unaccompanied and with an ironic vocal inflection. This is the only instance in which this occurs. Immediately following is a lyrical, solo cello line meant to direct the listener toward the conclusion that, perhaps, Bahkti has finally found his literary voice.

Another example of this type of narrative turn can be see in "Lawrence Senkovic" when the opening character description suddenly breaks off into a narrative account of meeting his brother at a paleontology conference. The music illuminates this change by shifting from a slow, deranged, diatonic lullaby to fast, agitated, dissonant music. When the author addresses the audience by asking the question, "Who runs into one's own brother[…]except for those of us who have gone extinct?" the fast music returns to the lullaby. While the form of this song (ABA) is just as simple as the text itself, the relationship that develops between the opening and closing material suggests to the audience that perhaps both brothers are actually dead.

One consideration that was taken into account when selecting these three texts from the twenty that Mosadeq provided was differentiation in content and structure. This is most clearly articulated in a comparison of "James Bahkti" and "Saba Ventus." Where the story of Bahkti is concerned with change, Ventus remains unchanged. Though the role of the cello was not intended to illustrate the text per se, there were certain exceptions. In "James Bahkti," text painting was a starting point for material that gradually evolved as Bahkti changed. The opening material, which is principally defined by a series of artificial harmonics, makes distant reference to similar sounds found in Castiglioni's *Inverno-in-ver* and Abrahamsen's *Schnee*. In doing so, this sound world evokes the fragile iciness of winter when

Bahkti's story begins. As he writes and thus changes, these artificial harmonics become fingered pitches, grounding the music and making way for the passage of time. Simultaneously, a large-scale rhythmic cross relationship occurs. Both artificial harmonics and fingered pitches are initially accompanied by rhythmic stability. As the fingered pitch material acquires force, however, its rhythmic integrity begins to disintegrate.

In contrast, the *lack* of musical development in "Saba Ventus" aims to depict her lack of character development and her general state of being. The most interesting idea to emerge in this story is how constant change can paradoxically create the illusion of stasis. For Ventus, whose story is marked by frequent departures to new locations around the globe, a question arises as to what constitutes excitement and what constitutes an ordinary situation. This contradiction is achieved primarily through the relationship between pitch, rhythm and tempo. Unlike the first two songs, "Saba Ventus" remains in a single tempo throughout with few deviations from triple metered time signatures. The song's moderate tempo (q. = 76) allows for quick pitch changes within each beat while maintaining a relatively slow harmonic rhythm. The main motivic idea is an oscillation between two notes heard at the beginning in the cello's introduction. A more developed version of this motive involving the use of larger intervals can be heard when the voice enters. Thus, the relationship between the opening cello music and the opening vocal music is purely motivic and that the common denominator throughout the song is always rhythm. Though the pitches change often and indeed, somewhat arbitrarily, the song's rhythmic intensity and drive is constant. These ideas do not change throughout the song because Ventus does not change. Therefore, the music becomes an illustration of exactly who Mosadeq thinks Ventus is in the present, rather than who I think she might become.

2.8.4 CONCLUSIONS

The very difficulties I encountered in the collaborative process of *Three Biographies* became an opportunity to appropriately contribute to this overall investigation of different text/music relationships. As outlined in **figure 2** in chapter 1.2.4, this project was meant to represent the most traditional realization of text and music with the words as the main focus and, therefore, in complete control of the musical material. Had our initial collaborative goals been met, this surely would not have been the case. In a situation where it was collectively understood that each element (text, music, voice) furthered the creation of the other two, a hierarchy of material and of roles would not have existed, and the piece would not have met its own criteria. What was unanticipated was how complex and challenging it would be to make various decisions under such constraints. With a small instrumentation and a piece that fell into a traditional genre, it was presumed that this would be the easiest of the eight projects because there was a limited range of decisions to be made. Instead, it involved making a series of strategic choices about how certain musical parameters can best support the meaning, language, and form of a text. While the music was always subservient to the words, compositional decisions had to be made not only about pitch, rhythm, texture, and form, but also about the destiny of each of the characters and who they are outside of their written stories. I began this project with the assumption that hierarchy was something to fight against, but I have learned that when it is accepted as a plausible compositional limitation, the possibilities for invention are endless and the results hopefully compelling.

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS

3.1 REFLECTIONS AND OUTCOMES

Broadly speaking, the eight works in this doctorate survey four text-based musical genres: programmatic music, music structured by textual/narrative characteristics, narrated music, and song. As a result of the interdisciplinary nature of this doctoral research, collaboration has been crucial to the formation of these works.

I have had the privilege of working with a number of different writers whose breadth of work and experiences have brought something original to my music. Among these writers are Jonathan Dubow (*as though birds*, *The Mysteries of Jacob*), Ghazal Mosadeq (*Three Biographies*), Sophia Veltfort (*Three Pieces (To the Sea in a Sieve*)) and Michael Schiavo (*Beautiful School*). Our various projects together have resulted in five highly contrasting pieces that explore an extensive range of questions. These works, however, have all been products of a certain type of collaboration. *as though birds*, *The Mysteries of Jacob* and *Three Pieces* were excerpted from larger works while the poetry set in *Beautiful School* and *Three Biographies* retained its original form. Some writers including Dubow and Schiavo involved themselves only in the writing process, while others such as Mosadeq and Veltfort were eager to participate in the rehearsal and performance processes. In each case, text preceded the music. Collaboration with these writers, therefore, did not take place at the generative level. Instead, these pieces were composed around the text, so that the music responded to ideas communicated through language.

For quite a while, this frustrated my creative sensibilities and distorted the long-term vision I had for myself and for my work. I hoped that my doctoral research would facilitate a form of collaboration that wove text and music together in an evolutionary way – so that the

text grew out of the music and the music out of the text. I saw this give-and-take as a necessary skill for a young composer's survival in the 21st century. I still do, but it looks different now.

Entering into collaboration after the writing phase had advantages that I am only able to see with some distance. The use of texts that were fully worked out meant that the writers were able to directly articulate the intentions behind their words. This provided a very clear set of parameters that governed each piece. While some may see this as restrictive, I found it creatively freeing. Certainly, these eight pieces do not begin to exhaust the myriad possibilities that exist between language and music. However, they do focus on a specific set of ways that text can be applied to music and the numerous possibilities that result from such rigorous limitation. In my portfolio, words affect form/structure, rhythm/meter, pitch relationships, orchestration, texture/timbre, mood and musical meaning. Perhaps most importantly, the presence of text in each of these musical settings establishes tensions that are unique to each project. With every piece, I sought to reinvent my approach to a text and to build upon previous work. I learned to question the boundaries of each piece and to be open to the successful and unsuccessful musical outcomes. As a result, these projects are quite different from one another and represent a changing course of decision-making over a period of years.

My recent music does not involve words. My work with text, however, has influenced my compositional practice as well as the current direction of my music. Since I finished the work for this dissertation, my music has changed dramatically, becoming far more intentional and far more personal. In the absence of words, I have begun to understand the necessity of working to define the terms of a piece and the importance of implementing a flexible set of limitations. This has resulted in music that favors harmonic,

formal, textural and conceptual transparency. *Lightenings*, for example, a chamber work written shortly after *Sleep & Unremembrance*, is a set of nine variations based on an ancient Christian hymn, *Phos Hilaron*. The idea was to look at this existing music from an economical and highly reductive point of view in order to parse it into tiny ideas. Each variation, therefore, distorts and refracts a fragment of the original hymn and then reassembles the music into a variety of distinct sound worlds. The piece focuses largely on extreme melodic and harmonic clarity and is characterized by very delicate sound colors. My most recent piece, *All These Lighted Things*, written for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, takes a similarly focused approach. The work is made of up three dances, two of which are elaborated binary forms and one that resembles a developing ternary form. Each dance derives from melodic ideas composed at the onset of the project. Where my previous orchestral pieces have been substantially gestural, this piece works to integrate that gestural tendency into a more comprehensive and nuanced musical rhetoric. Gesture, for example, might enhance a melodic or a harmonic idea, but it is less often than before the focal point.

What I have noticed in my newer pieces is a newfound confidence in my musical values. My dissertation allowed me to identify certain ideas that I can and cannot live without. Many of my pieces, for instance, evolve from a melodic idea. I tried for so long to hide that fact by obscuring any traces of melodic material for fear of appearing too conventional. I found that embracing my inclination toward melodically oriented music has opened up a whole new level of compositional activity such as a sensitivity toward sound and a much better understanding of how structure can function as an expressive tool in my music.

My proclivity for creative constraints has made way for necessary changes in my compositional process. Over the course of my doctoral degree, that process has become much more malleable and much less linear. Where I used to compose from beginning to end, I now think of my musical ideas as part of a network that continually expands as I explore the directions that they can take. Though this approach is time consuming and requires tremendous patience, I am able to be far more selective about my material, I am able to communicate something much more direct, and I have the tools to constantly reinvent my work. Ultimately, this kind of give-and-take is one that, for me, is sustainable, fulfilling and forward-looking.

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