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Characterization in Crane, Lang, and Mazzoli's Chamber Operas

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Abstract

Characterization is the musical creation of fictional characters, and it is particularly important for creating multi-dimensional, nuanced characters in opera.[1] However, how do composers characterize roles if the opera does not feature a traditionally linear plot or story? Does opera need a narrative to create characterization? Some may view narrative simply as telling a story, but scholars disagree over what narrative is and its applications to opera. Jean-Jacques Nattiez cites one view of narrative as, "stories [can] only exist where both events and existents occur."[2] In Nina Penner's *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater*, she claims while other vocal genres, such as oratorio and art song do not need narrative, opera requires it. She is surprisingly dismissive of operas without a traditional dramatic narrative when she writes, "There are non-narrative operas, such as *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), but these are few and far between, and they remain on the periphery of the opera canon."[3] I disagree with Penner's claim. I will demonstrate how operas with nonlinear narratives still can tell stories and how their composers characterize their characters, focusing on David Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field,* Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*, and my own opera, *I DID, DID I?*.

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[1] Miriam Lensky, "Characterization in the Dramatic Works of Hector Berlioz" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1997), 5 and 16, ProQuest 301584772.

[2] Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Katharine Ellis, "Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 115, no. 2 (1990): 240-257. https://www.jstor.org/stable/766438, 241.

[3] Nina Penner, *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University of Press, 2020), 25.

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Chapter 1 - Drama and Characterization in Nontraditional Narratives

How do composers musically depict their operas' characters? Characterization is the musical creation of fictional characters, and it is essential for for creating multi-dimensional, nuanced characters.[1] Similar to other dramatic forms, opera creates characters through storytelling. However, how do composers characterize roles if the opera does not feature a traditionally linear plot or story?

In Nina Penner's *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater*, she writes, "There are non-narrative operas, such as *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), but these are few and far between, and they remain on the periphery of the opera canon, in part because of their denial of our expectation for storytelling."[2] I disagree with Penner's statement that operas with non-narrative stories are solely "on the periphery" of opera repertoire. I will demonstrate how operas with nonlinear narratives still can tell stories and how their composers characterize their characters. I will focus on David Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field,* Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*, and my own opera, *I DID, DID I?*.

Before discussing how these three operas differ from traditionally linear opera plots, a brief description of each work is necessary. All three pieces are chamber operas, written for a small number of singers and instrumentalists, and feature non-traditional narratives.

David Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field* premiered in 2002, and Mac Wellman wrote the libretto. The inspiration for the opera was an 1888 story by Ambrose Bierce, which describes

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[1] Miriam Lensky, "Characterization in the Dramatic Works of Hector Berlioz" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1997), 5 and 16, ProQuest 301584772.

[2] Nina Penner, *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 25.

a pre-Civil War Southerner, Mr. Williamson, who disappeared in front of his family, neighbors, and slaves while walking across a field in front of his house in Selma, Alabama. The fictional story mirrors the author's life because Bierce's own vanishment at age 71 was also never explained. The opera continually shifts between moments after, during, and before Mr. Williamson's disappearance. However, the overall plot is framed as a trial in which a magistrate listens to witnesses' accounts of what purportedly happened to determine the distribution of Mr. Williamson's estate. The audience hears seven different descriptions of what occurred, although they never fully learn what happened to Mr. Williamson. Lang discussed how Mr. Williamson's disappearance is a punishment for his sins of owning slaves and being such a cruel human.[3] The opera was written for five principal characters, a chorus of slaves, and string quartet.

Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar* premiered in 2012. Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek co-wrote the libretto. *Song from the Uproar* focuses on the extraordinary life of Swiss-Russian explorer and writer, Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904.) The opera begins after the deaths of Eberhardt's father, mother, and brother, all in quick succession. Eberhardt then travels alone to Algeria, where she dresses as a man, converts to Islam, and joins a Sufi order. While roaming the desert, she falls in love with an Algerian soldier. Eberhardt survives an attempted assassination and her own failed suicide attempt with her lover, only to die in a desert flash flood at age 27. The only clear character is Eberhardt, which is for a mezzo, but the opera also features a chorus. The instrumental ensemble is flute, clarinet, electric guitar, double bass, and piano, as well as frequent electronics.

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[3] David Lang interviewed by Liza Sobel Crane, October 24, 2022.

My opera, *I DID, DIDI I?*, premiered in 2022. In addition to composing the opera, I co-wrote the libretto with Gina Elia. It was commissioned by the Zafa Collective and premiered at Chicago's Poetry Foundation. *I DID, DID I?* is for two sopranos, and I sang the role of Woman Two. The instrumental ensemble is flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin, and cello. The opera begins with Woman One preparing to head out for a party while Woman Two stays home. At first the audience believes the two women are interacting. Later, however, the audience realizes something is awry when they again experience the opening scene of Woman One getting ready, but now Woman Two's dialogue is completely different. Eventually, the audience learns that the two women are the same person at different points in time. Woman One is the persona she was the night before she was raped, while Woman Two is who she becomes after being raped. Woman Two replays the same scenes as Woman One, but with diverse perspectives and retrieved gaps in "their" memories.

Debates over narrative

Composers and librettists characterize their opera characters through narrative. Some may view narrative simply as telling a story, but scholars disagree over what narrative is and its applications to opera. Jann Pasler distinguishes between narrative and storytelling as "*Story* is *signified* or the subject of a *discourse* and the *narrative* (narrative text) as the *signifier*, that which communicates the story to the perceiver."[4] Penner defines narrative as "an utterance

[4] Jann Pasler, *Writing Through Music: Essays on Music, Culture, and Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27.

intended to communicate a story, which necessarily involves representing particular agents exercising their agency through particular intentional acts."[5]

In addition to questions about opera and narrative, there are even more fundamental questions over classifying works as opera. Herbert Lindenberger creates a category he calls "quasi-opera" or "not quite opera." He cites Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* as an example of quasi-opera. In *Pierrot Lunaire*, which is essentially a song cycle (or more accurately Sprechstimme cycle), the performer often wears a costume and uses visual motions to enhance the effect.[6]

Lindenberger's term quasi-opera can apply to Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*. She originally began the work as a song cycle, only later converting it into an opera. As mentioned previously, the protagonist role of Isabelle Eberhart is the only clear character the audience sees throughout the work.[7]

Even more extreme than the quasi-opera designation, Jelena Novak deems the term "opera" old fashioned, instead preferring the label "postopera." As Novak writes, "It [postopera] designated unconventional contemporary operatic works in which the relationship between music and drama is reinvented, and in which the impact of new media for the operatic world is significant." Novak compares postopera to post-dramatic theater, in which all events, not just

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[5] Penner, *Storytelling*, 18.

[6] Herbert Lindenberger, *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 216-217.

[7] Lauren Ishida, "Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*: A Masterpiece of Modern Opera," *I Care If You Listen*, March 19, 2012, https://www.icareifyoulisten.com/2012/03/missy-mazzolis-song-from-the-uproar-a-masterpiece-of-modern-opera/.

those related to plot, receive equal attention. Similarly representing the libretto is not postopera's primary goal.[8]

Carolyn Abbate describes a more traditional narrative form to which audiences are most accustomed. A typical narrative features one character's perspective, monaural and intentionally conveys an accurate and unfictionalized report of real events.[9] On the other hand less straightforward narratives explore the unreliable narrator, which Penner describes as where the audience doubts the narrator's accuracy.[10]

Both David Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field* and my opera, *I DID, DID I?*, employ unreliable narrators. In addition, Lang's opera has character-focused narration, in which the protagonists narrate from their limited perspective.[11] *the difficulty of crossing a field*'s unreliable narrators and the character-focused narration is clear when the magistrate frames the entire opera as a trial, in which each person tells their version of Mr. Williamson's disappearance to determine his estate's distribution. Nina Penner's following quote applies particularly well to Lang's opera, "The latter half of the nineteenth century saw an increased interest in the subjectivity of narration, demonstrated by the tendency for librettists to juxtapose multiple accounts of the same event."[12]

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[8] Jelena Novak, "From Minimalist Music to Post Opera," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn, The Ashgate Research Companion, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 134.

[9] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 1991), 63.

[10] Penner, *Storytelling*, 66.

[11] Penner, 114.

[12] Penner, 81.

Unlike *the difficulty of crossing a field,* in my opera, *I DID, DID I?*, the unreliable narrator is only gradually revealed. Penner cites the movie *Fight Club* as an excellent unreliable narrator example, and it also influenced my opera.[13] Only late into the film does the audience realize that the unnamed narrator, portrayed by Edward Norton, is the same person as Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt. Durden is Norton's character's alter ego. This revelation causes Norton's character (and the audience) to question much of what we've seen in the film previously, particularly when the two characters "interacted" with each other. As the audience and Norton realize that Durden and Norton's characters are the same person, they see earlier scenes in which the two men supposedly communicate with each other. However, now the audience learns that Norton was actually by himself.

In addition to *Fight Club, A Beautiful Mind* and *The Sixth Sense* are two other films in which the audience learns important characters are not real. These movies were also influential for Gina Elia and me when we wrote the libretto. In all three movies, the discovery that central characters are not real is surprising for the audience, as well as the protagonists. The common element for the revelation is that the fantasy person, whom only the protagonist sees, is in the same room with other real characters. Only upon later re-watchings of the movies, does the viewer notice that the imaginary character only interacts with the protagonist. However, because the protagonist interacts with both the fantasy person and the real characters, the viewer at first mistakenly believes the unreal person also engages with everyone else.

Similar to the three movies, in *I DID, DID I?*, the audience also learns later in the opera that Women One and Two are the same person at different points in time. Woman One is the

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[13] Penner, 115.

memory of Woman Two from the night she was raped. However unlike the films, in which the protagonists only later learns another character(s) is not real, Woman Two always knew that Woman One is her memory; only the audience later learns this crucial information. When the viewer sees Woman One repeat her preparations for the party, her text and melody are always the same. It is the information that Woman Two reveals that dramatically changes the audience's perception of the events.

In our opera, Elia and I had the additional challenge of having only the two women on stage. Although the initial reason for featuring two characters was budget constraints, it forced Elia and me to be creative with how we dramatically represented additional characters beyond the two women. Ultimately, the audience does not see the characters Woman One interacts with at the party. In particular, Woman One engages with an unnamed man, most likely the person who assaulted her. Not showing the mystery man to the audience presents him as a hazy memory, not fully formed, which further reflects that Woman One was most likely drugged.

Nontraditional Narrative in Contemporary Operas

In addition to Lang's and my operas employing unreliable narrators, all three works share a lack of traditional narration. Jann Pasler labels the three forms of nontraditional narrative as anti-narrative, non-narrativity, and non-narrative. They challenge traditional aspects of narrative with varying degrees by which they employ organizing principles. Pasler describes the three nontraditional narrative forms as, "call[ing] into question the logic of narrative that 'one thing leads to one and only one other, the second to a third and so on to the finale.'"[14]

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[14] Pasler, *Writing,* 38.

Of the three structural types, anti-narrative is the most similar to typical narrative. Anti-narrative relies on a listener's narrative expectation, but frustrates it through continual interruptions of a work's temporal process and features changes without narrative transformation.[15] Going further, Pasler describes non-narrativity as shunning any organizing principle, whether an overall structure or preordained syntax, and ultimately erasing the role of memory for a plot.[16] In between anti-narrative and non-narrativity is Pasler's term non-narrative (which is confusingly similar in terminology.) Non-narrative differs from non-narrativity in that non-narrative employs narrative elements but prevents them from functioning as they normally would in more traditional narratives.[17]

Mazzoli discussed her decision to avoid a chronological narrative in *Song from the Uproar* in her program notes:

> "Our understanding of Isabelle Eberhardt's life will always be incomplete, cobbled together from fragments of a journal pulled out of a flood, sporadic recollections from people who knew her or pretended to have known her, and the few articles and short stories she published. I felt that an opera about her life should be similarly fragmented—an evocation of her dreams and thoughts rather than a straightforward narrative. I began to imagine what was left unwritten in her journals, how it felt to wander alone through the desert dressed as a man, how it felt to be one of the only Europeans to witness Sufi religious ceremonies, and how it felt to fall deeply in love but struggle to maintain a fiercely independent lifestyle."[18]

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[15] Pasler, *Writing*, 38.

[16] Pasler, 41.

[17] Pasler, 40.

[18] Mazzoli, Missy, Program Notes *Chautauqua Opera Company Song from the Uproar, 2016,* https://www.chq.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SongFromtheUproar.pdf

In my interview with Mazzoli, she described the opera's drama as "flashes of significant experiences rather than narrative," "her [Eberhardt's] life flashing before her eyes at the moment of her death," and as "the kaleidoscope of her emotions about everything she's lived through."[19] Although *Song from the Uproar* is fragmented as Mazzoli discussed, it has the most traditional narrative among the three operas - the word "traditional" being relative. I would label *Songs from the Uproar* as anti-narrative because although the story is fragmented, the events in Eberhardt's life progress in a somewhat chronological order from earlier in her life to ending with her death.

I would also categorize my own opera as anti-narrative. As mentioned previously, at first the audience believes the two women are separate individuals interacting. Initially, the audience thinks they see the chronological progression of Woman One preparing for a party and her experiences at the event. Meanwhile, Woman Two remains at home sorting her laundry. She questions where her red sheer shirt is, which the audience later learns she wore the night of her assault and has not seen since. Woman Two's thoughts about her missing shirt interrupt the plot's chronological progression. This disruption reveals that the plot is not linear. The questions about Woman Two's missing red sheer shirt causes the memory to repeat as Woman One re-enters and again prepares for a night out.

In this second iteration of Woman One's preparations, the anti-narrative interruptions continue. Woman One sings the same melody and text as in the beginning, however now Woman Two does not even appear to "respond" to Woman One as she did previously. Instead, Woman Two's music is dramatically different, with Woman Two lost in her own thoughts,

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[19] Missy Mazzoli interviewed by Liza Sobel Crane on November 21, 2022.

questioning what she may or may not have worn that night. Woman Two's interruptions of Woman One's music reveal that they are the same person.

Ultimately the plot has no progression. Although Woman Two knows that most likely she was raped, the opera concludes with Woman Two directly asking Woman One to repeat the memory of her heading out for the party, which is the most obvious anti-narrative interruption. Woman Two explicitly asks Woman One to repeat the memory in the vain hope that she can remember additional information from that night. Woman One enters and repeats her music and text of preparing for the party. However, during this third repetition near the opera's end, Woman One sings alone without any comments or responses from Woman Two. Although Woman One's text, melody, and overall cheerful mood are the same as before, the instrumental accompaniment reflects the audience's foreknowledge that Woman One will be sexually assaulted at the party she will attend.

Unlike Mazzoli's and my operas, Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field* best fits Pasler's non-narrative label. The opera's central dramatic event is Mr. Williamson's disappearance, but the viewer sees and hears the vanishment from numerous, and sometimes even contradictory, perspectives. Lang described the librettist's strategy as taking a "simple but supernatural story and trying to tell it from several different dimensions."[20]

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[20] Lang interview.

Difficulties with Narrative in Minimalism and Post-Minimalism Music

In addition to the lack of a clear dramatic narrative, Lang and Mazzoli's operas' Postminimalist styles present additional challenges for analysis, which will be discussed later. However, it is debatable if the composers would even categorize themselves as Minimalist or Postminimalist. For example, Mazzoli rejects formal labels for her music. As Caitlin Martinac quotes Mazzoli:

> "Though also inspired by minimalists, Mazzoli maintains that 'any label falls flat and is incomplete' regarding her music. She clarifies that she is 'very comfortable with the word composer. But I don't even like to call the work classical. I just try to talk enough about the story behind the work to get people interested.' For all her classical inspirations, Mazzoli asserts that she is committed to being a composer *now* and making music that can only be made now."[21]

Likewise, David Lang, one of the founding members of the Bang on a Can collective, also eschews specific labels, instead embracing a plethora of styles and genres. The group celebrates a variety of music through their annual marathon's eclectic programing. Robert Fink describes Bang on a Can as an "omnivorous style 'totalism'; what else could one say about impresarios whose first BOAC [Bang on a Can] marathon knowingly placed Reich's *Four Organs*, the *ne plus ultra* of early minimalism, next to Milton Babbitt's twelve-tone *Vision and Prayer*?"[22]

However, despite Mazzoli and Lang's avoidance of music categorizations, most theorists identify their music as Postminimalist. Although some employ the labels Minimalism and

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[21] Caitlin Martinac, "Mosaics: Profiles in Social Justice and Advocacy in the Works of Gabriela Lena Frank, Missy Mazzoli, and Jennifer Jolley," (MA thesis, Arizona State University, 2021), 25-26, ProQuest 28493620.

[22] Robert Fink "(Post-)minimalisms 1970-2000: the search for a new mainstream," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music,* ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople. The Cambridge History of Music (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 546.

Postminimalism interchangeably, most scholars agree there is a distinction. It is crucial to understand the two genre's differences.

Critics and authors began employing the term Postminimalism as early as 1981. Some of the biggest distinctions between Minimalism and Postminimalism are duration, venue, and performers. Minimalist works are often evening length, usually performed in informal venues outside of typical concert halls, and feature open instrumentation and/or ensembles in which the composers play their own pieces. On the other hand, Postminimalist pieces are often shorter, lasting 5 to 25 minutes (excluding concert-length operas), performed in more traditional concert hall venues, and feature specified instrumentations. The Postminimalist identifiers apply to Lang and Mazzoli's operas through featuring a fixed instrumentation, being performed by musicians other than the composers, and being featured in more traditional concert and theater venues.

In addition, although Postminimalism was influenced by Minimalist styles, it also is impacted by many other genres, such as Balinese Gamelan, folk, pop, jazz, 18th century chamber music, Renaissance music, and more.[23] Minimalism is just one of many influences in Postminimalist music. Jonathan Bernard identifies the major changes from Minimalism to Postminimalism as the music becoming more complicated, a greater concern with sonority in itself, the music sounding more "harmonic" with chords, although not specifically tonal, and later Postminimalism music becoming increasingly more tonal, which he labeled "quasi-tonal."[24]

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[23] Kyle, Gann, "A Technically Definable Stream of Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meaning," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn. The Ashgate Research Companion (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 40.

[24] Jonathan W. Bernard, "Minimalism, Postminimalism and Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music," *American Music* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 114, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3250558.

In terms of Postminimalism music becoming more complex, the importance of a composition's structure - or lack thereof - is one of the biggest shifts between Minimalism and Postminimalism. Early Minimalism was famous for its focus on clearly identifiable structures, in particular phasing in Steve Reich's music and additive processes in Philip Glass's works. In 1968, Reich even went so far as to write that he aspired to compose music in which the "compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing."[25] However, as Jelena Novak writes, "Postminimalism opened itself up to the new opportunities suggested by the possibility that repetitive music could represent something besides its own sound structures."[26] Bernard described Postminimalism as "a kind of hybrid…combining an extremely simple tonal structure with vestiges of a minimalist structure."[27] Although Lang and Mazzoli's operas feature sections with repetitive structures and harmonic status, unlike earlier Minimalist music, having the listeners detect the music's changes is not the composers' primary goal.

In earlier "traditional" classical repertoire, listeners identify important narrative moments through repetition and contrast. However, with Minimalism and Postminimalism's frequent repetition, how do composers create narrative? Both Minimalism and Postminimalism have perplexed scholars analyzing narrative with both Bryon Almén and Jann Pasler describing minimalist music as non-narrative. Almén writes, "minimalist styles frequently deemphasize contrasts (in the sense of topical or narrative oppositions)."[28] Likewise, Pasler writes:

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[25] Steve Reich, *Writings about Music* (Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), 10.

[26] Novak, "Minimalist," 131.

[27] Bernard, "Minimalism," 116.

[28] Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 91.

> "Much minimal music falls into this category [nonnarrative.] It consists largely of traditional tonal triads and their inversions however, the triads are not used as structural means of establishing, departing from, and returning to a tonal center, nor are they incidental references to the tonal system. Operas composed in the minimal style may likewise employ traditional operatic means - singers, stage events, and so on - but they are usually not signifiers of some drama or the signifieds of the music. Stage activity and sound in the Glass operas, for example, are linked only in that they occur at the same time. Most singing in *Akhnaten* is by choruses that, by their nature, do not attempt any characterization."[29]

On the other hand, Jonathan W. Bernard rejects the notion that Minimalism is static. As he writes:

> "But beyond this local level there is a steady sequence of changes; in fact, the entire work could be said to be dedicated to the process of change. Moreover, the larger pattern that is established after a few phase shifts effectively instills in the listener an *expectation* that further shifts will occur, each after an inexactly specified yet not indeterminate number of reputations of a new configuration. The periodic accumulation of tension associated with such expectation and its corresponding release upon fulfillment, taken together, are anything but static."[30]

Just as theorists do not consider a waltz in a constant 3/4 meter to be rigid, neither should analysts view a Minimalist or Postminimalist work with a restricted harmonic palette as sameness. As Bernard writes, "There are, after all, other ways available in both cases to promote variation and progression. Analysts ignore at their peril minimalist composers' intense interest in strictly controlling listeners' sense of the passage of time."[31] Though Lang and Mazzoli's operas feature periods of harmonic stasis and repetition, their music still features great variety and contrasts, which will be discussed in the individual chapters on their works.

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[29] Pasler, *Writing*, 40.

[30] Jonathan W. Bernard, "Theory, Analysis and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945: Essays and analytical Studies*, ed. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann. Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 263.

[31] Bernard, "Theory," 263.

Chapter 2 - David Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field*

Ordering of events

Because Lang's *the difficulty of a crossing a field* features different characters describing their versions of the same event, the audience sees conflicting stories. However, despite the opera's necessary unreliable narrators, it could have begun with a more traditional chronological order of Mr. Williamson's disappearance followed by the characters' retellings of what happened to him. Another possible structure is framing the entire opera as a trial by beginning with the Magistrate. However, Wellman, the librettist, and Lang chose not to begin with these more typical chronological structures. Instead, the opera progresses between various points in time, switching back and forth between moments after, before, and during Williamson's disappearance.

After opening with the string quartet playing alone, Scene 1 begins with Mrs. Williamson describing her thoughts after her husband's disappearance. She repeatedly sings that it was "more than a mere disappearance." Her melody and the quartet's accompanying figure recurs throughout the opera and gain structural importance, which will be discussed later.

Her solo immediately leads to two enslaved people, Virginia Creeper's and Sam's retellings, who each gradually layer their melodies on top of one another. Interlude 2 begins with the Williamson Girl predicting before her father's death that something terrible would happen to him. Finally, only in Scene 2, nearly 10 minutes into the opera, does the Magistrate contextualize for the audience what happened: Mr. Williamson disappeared and this is a trial to distribute his estate. In this same scene, the audience also learns for the first time specifically what happened to Mr. Williamson when his neighbor, Armour Wren, describes the disappearance.

After the revelation in Scene 2 that opera is a trial, the following scenes could have continued with characters' statements over what happened to Mr. Williamson. However once again, Lang and Wellman do not progress sequentially after the vanishment. The following Scene 3 jumps earlier chronologically, before Mr. Williamson's vanishment, with him still alive, and Scene 4 switches to after his disappearance. Scene 5 returns to the trial after his vanishment with Williamson's brother, Andrew, describing to the Magistrate what happened. Only in Interlude 3, approximately 2/3 into the opera do we see Mr. Williamson's disappearance. Scenes 6 and 7 continue after his vanishment with Mrs. Williamson, Sam, and the Williamson Girl all reflecting on their experiences of the event.

The opera ends before Mr. Williamson's disappearance in the Closing Scene that predicted his demise. Earlier in the opera, in Scene 3, before Mr. Williamson's vanishment, the Williamson Girl read her poem to him, and he was very dismissive of it. Ending with her poem showcases her prediction's significance. Depending on how the opera were staged, the Williamson Girl singing her poem could be before her father's death, or it could be staged as after his disappearance. By repeating her poem, and having her sing it this time, rather than simply speak it as she did previously in Scene 3, it further highlights her prescience.

Waiting until over halfway through the opera to feature the disappearance itself in Interlude 3 makes Mr. Williamson's death more significant and dramatic. Throughout Interlude 3, Mr. Williamson speaks various phrases that other characters previously said when describing what happened to him. These phrases becoming increasingly important throughout the opera, which will be discussed later. Beginning with his vanishment would tell the audience what occurred, preventing the viewer from forming their own opinion. However, by waiting until over

halfway through the opera to feature the disappearance, the audience experiences for themselves whether the other characters' stories align with or depart from the event, allowing the viewer to create their own conclusions about what happened to Mr. Williamson.

The role of dialogue versus singing

Almost bordering on a Singspiel, Lang's opera features large amounts of spoken dialogue. Otherwise, the work differs widely from the Singspiel genre in terms of its subject matter and emotional nature. In particular, the scenes over which the Magistrate presides, Scenes 2 and 5, feature heavy amounts of dialogue. Although there are some characters who exclusively speak, such as the Magistrate, Armour Wren, and Mr. Williamson, every character talks at some point throughout the opera.

The amount of spoken dialogue in the opera reflects that the librettist, Mac Wellman, initially viewed the story more as a play with songs rather than an opera. When Wellman sent Lang the text, Wellman never expected Lang to set it all to music. In addition, Lang noted that the work was not commissioned by an opera house or a concert hall, but rather by the American Conservatory Theater, where Lang was the Composer-in-Residence and Wellman was the Playwright-in-Residence. Lang enjoys mixing opera and musical theater singing styles in his compositions. Only the role of Mrs. Williamson was written for a classical singer. He composed the rest of the roles for actors, which influenced the amount of spoken dialogue in the opera.

It is particularly notable that Mr. Williamson, on whom the entire opera's plot focuses, never sings himself. Lang felt that Mr. Williamson was too repugnant to employ the beauty of

singing to represent his character. Instead, he speaks over the string quartet's playing throughout Interlude 3, when his disappearance is depicted.

Despite Williamson's abhorrent nature, which prevented Lang from allowing him to sing, paradoxically Lang described Mr. Williamson's Interlude 3 as the opera's most beautiful music. Lang called Mr. Williamson's disappearance as "a moment of revelation" over his vile behavior towards his slaves and that Williamson is "purified" through his disappearance.[32]

In addition to noting which characters do not sing, it is also important to note which characters do sing. The singing characters are Mrs. Williamson, the Williamson Girl, Virginia Creeper, Sam, the Old Woman, and Mr. Williamson's brother, Andrew. Other than Andrew, all the other characters who also sing have their testimonies dismissed due to their identities. In Scene 5, Andrew declares that Mrs. Williamson has "lost her reason" and that the Williamson Girl "has proved a complete ninny."[33] The court and Andrew label both Williamson women with the common female stereotype as hysterical, crazy women.

Similar to the female characters whose testimonies are dismissed, the audience learns in Scene 5 that the enslaved people's testimonies are also dismissed due to their identities. Andrew states that, "Sam, being a black boy is judged incompetent to give his testimony."[34] Furthermore, Andrew labels the other enslaved people's descriptions of his brother's disappearance as "monstrous and grotesque fictions."[35] Other than Andrew, all the characters who sing are powerless due to either their gender and/or race. Although they have ideas of what

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[32] Lang interview.

[33] David Lang, *the difficulty of crossing a field* (New York, NY: Red Poppy, 2002), 109.

[34] Lang, *difficulty*, 111.

[35] Lang, 108.

happened to Mr. Williamson, the Magistrate and Andrew, the white men in power, have no interest in their testimonies.

Recurring Melodies

Due to the opera's non-linear chronology and purposefully contradictory stories, there are numerous phrases, both musical motives and text, that recur throughout the opera. They become increasingly significant as other characters repeat them. Some of the phrases do not make sense initially, but eventually their meaning and importance are revealed.

Mrs. Williamson's Melody

The most important recurring melody is Mrs. Williamson's from Scene 1. In my interview with Lang, he discussed how the librettist Wellman presented the text to Lang and allowed Lang to rearrange the scenes' order. Unlike Wellman's original libretto, Lang believed that Mrs. Williamson was the most important character and rearranged the scenes to begin with her testimony. Lang stated,

> "Not only is the disappearance of her [Mrs. Williamson's] husband more personal to her than to anybody else, but also in the story, she's only described as Mrs. Williamson. And so, once Mr. Williamson is gone, we know nothing about her. She has no identity. She has no credential. We don't know her name. We don't know anything about her."[36]

Mrs. Williamson bookends the opera, beginning in Scene 1 with her testimony and again towards the opera's conclusion in Scene 7. Lang discussed how he began the entire opera by composing Mrs. Williamson's music first for Scene 7. Her aria in Scene 7 features her singing a

[36] Lang interview.

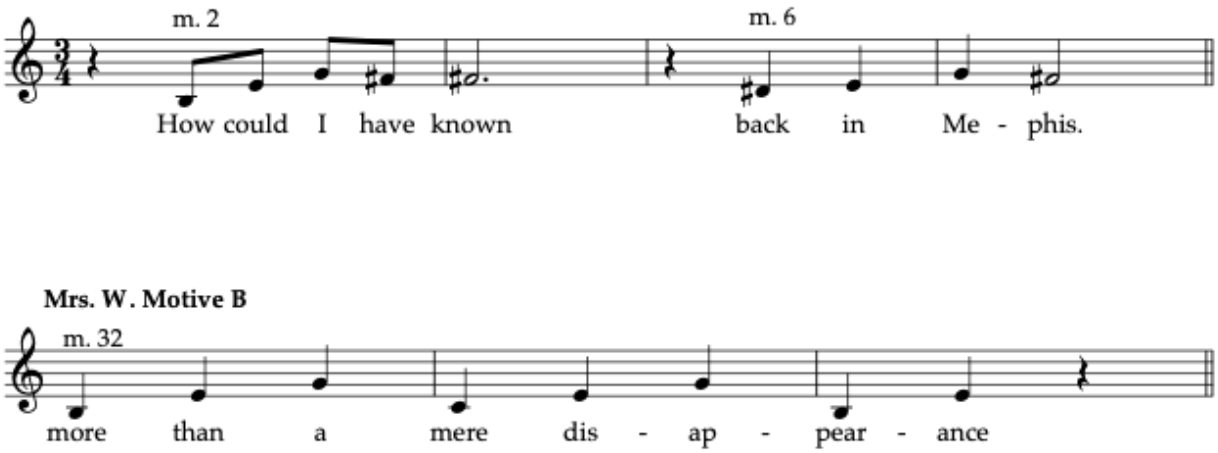
cappella with only the violin 1 entering later in m. 33. Lang wrote the aria first because he thought that the unusual instrumentation of mezzo-soprano and solo violin would appeal to the Kronos Quartet's violinist, David Harrington, which it did, ultimately leading to Kronos performing the world premiere.

After writing Scene 7, Lang returned to the opera's beginning unifying Mrs. Williamson's motive by writing Scene 1. Given that Lang viewed Mrs. Williamson as the most important character, it makes sense that her motive recurs the most frequently throughout the opera.[37] Since Lang composed first the final Scene 7 and then wrote Scene 1, it is also unsurprising that there are numerous harmonic, textural, and structural similarities between the two scenes that characterize Mrs. Williamson.

In both Scenes 1 and 7, her motive is dominated by E minor, with her melody often outlining an E minor triad. In Example 1, the two main versions of Mrs. Williamson's melody from Scene 1 are labeled Mrs. W. Motive A and Mrs. W. Motive B. Both outline a second inversion E minor triad. The two melodies' distinct rhythms differentiate the motives more than their pitches, which are often similar. Motive B is also dominated by its tension of alternating between B's and C's in the lowest note of the melody on the downbeats of m. 33 and 34.

[37] Lang interview.

Example 1 - Scene 1 from Lang's *difficulty of crossing a field*



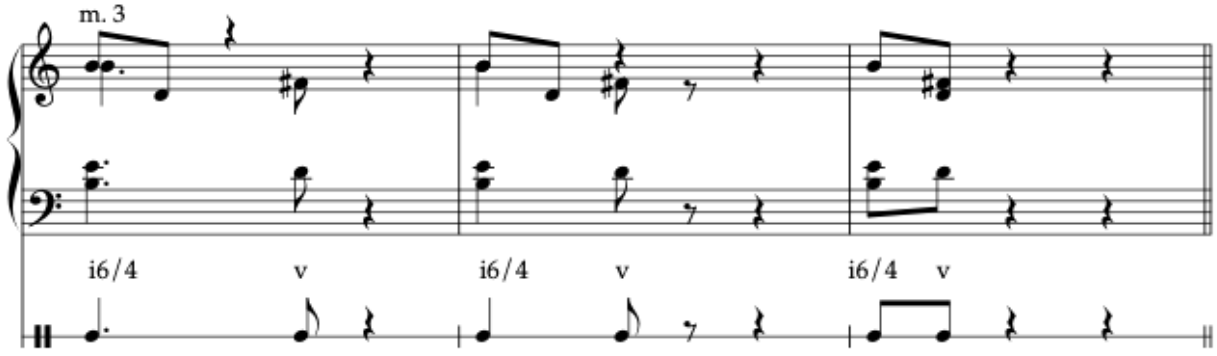
In addition to the prominent E minor tonality, both Scenes 1 and 7 are notable for the relationship between Mrs. Williamson and the string quartet. Most pieces with a vocal soloist and quartet often feature the quartet playing more continuously while the singer performs the main melody, which Lang does in other scenes. However, Mrs. Williamson's scenes are notable for the quartet's sparseness, or even lack thereof. As mentioned, in Scene 7, Mrs. Williamson sings a cappella until the violin 1 enters in m. 33. Even with the violin 1's entrance in m. 33, the texture is emptier than a listener may expect in a piece for voice and one instrument. The violin 1 functions as an additional melody, making their performance a duet rather than solo voice accompanied by violin.

Similarly, Mrs. Williamson's motive in Scene 1 is also characterized by the quartet's absence. Like Scene 7, Mrs. Williamson begins her motive in Scene 1 a cappella, although unlike Scene 7, the quartet enters more quickly in m. 3. However, Mrs. Williamson's motive in Scene 1 is still characterized by a similar spareness as in Scene 7. In Scene 1, Mrs. Williamson

and the quartet functions as a call response until m. 30. In both scenes, the quartet's sparseness musically depicts Mrs. Williamson's emptiness and isolation after her husband's disappearance.

In Scene 1, the quartet repeatedly responds to Mrs. Williamson's melody with a two chord pattern that recurs three times. The pattern alternates between an E minor i6/4 and minor dominant chord as depicted in Example 2. Although the two harmonies are the same each time they occur, the rhythm between the chords becomes increasingly shorter by an eighth note between the first i6/4 chord and second chord. The first chord is a dotted quarter note, the second pattern begins with a quarter note, and the third reiteration of the phrase is an eighth note.

Example 2 - Scene 1 from Lang's *difficulty of crossing a field*
String quartet ostinato



Similar to Scene 7, in which Lang waits approximately 30 measures to end Mrs. Williamson's a cappella singing with the violin's entrance, in Scene 1, Lang also waits a similar amount of time until m. 31, to deviate from the call-response pattern between Mrs. Williamson and the quartet. In Scene 1's m. 31, Lang layers both motives with the violin 1 playing Motive A while Mrs. Williamson sings Motive B. The harmonic chordal pattern continues in the viola and cello while the violin 2 also mirrors the voice. In m. 32-47, the violin 2 plays a rhythmically

delayed canon of Mrs. Williamson's melody. While Mrs. Williamson's Motive B features quarter notes playing in a 3/4 meter, the violin 2 plays the same melody with dotted quarter notes in a 6/8 meter, causing the violin 2's melody to increasingly lag behind Mrs. Williamson's motive. Only towards the end of each Mrs. Williamson B Motive does Lang break the canon with two eighth notes, uniting the violin 2 with Mrs. Williamson's motive.

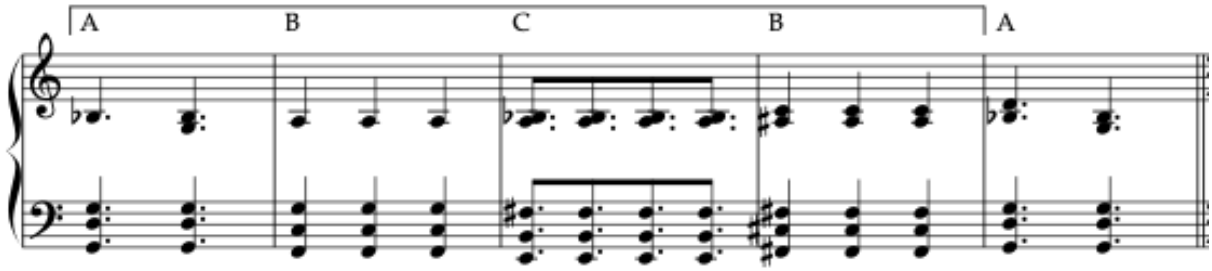
Her melody permeates throughout the opera. Lang alters and modifies it to suit different scenes. In m. 64, the listener at first may think that the rest of this scene will feature Creeper sharing her retelling of what happened to Mr. Williamson. Instead, Mrs. Williamson returns singing her motive in m. 93, 107, and 121. Though her motive is notated much slower rhythmically, with each note lasting for a dotted half note instead of a quarter note as previously, the longer notated duration reflects that the tempo has doubled. Ultimately the return of Mrs. Williamson's motive sounds only a little slower than the original melody. Similar to the initial Mrs. Williamson motive, this slower version also features the alteration between B's, E minor's dominant, and C, the submediant.

The return of Mrs. Williamson's motive indicates a scene's dramatic significance. For example, when her melody returns in Scene 1, she sings the phrase, "there are more mysteries in Selma." At first, this text may not mean much to the listener, but it becomes an important phrase later in the opera. Similarly in Scene 3, Mrs. Williamson's motive and the text returns on p. 51, m. 161. In this scene, which occurs before Mr. Williamson's disappearance, the Williamson Girl sings seemingly nonsensical statements to her father and mother about not talking today. While Mr. Williamson dismisses his daughter's comments, his wife is more receptive, actually engaging with her daughter's seemingly bizarre statements. Though Mrs. Williamson questions her

daughter's thoughts, the return of her motive in m. 161 demonstrates that there is some merit to the Williamson Girl's strange predictions.

Mrs. Williamson's motive's return in Scene 3 is transposed to G minor instead of its original E minor key. In addition, Lang alters Mrs. Williamson's motive's rhythm to suit the scene's rhythmic pattern. Scene 3's prominent four bar pattern is a rhythmic palindrome as demonstrated in Example 3: two dotted quarter notes in the first measure, three quarter notes in the next measure, four dotted eighth notes in the third measure, and followed with three quarter notes in the final bar. The Williamson Girl follows this rhythmic pattern consistently until m. 41, and the string quartet maintains the ostinato until m. 101. When Mrs. Williamson's motive returns in m. 161, it is rhythmically altered to fit this scene's prominent rhythmic pattern. In addition, the violin 1 often doubles portions of Mrs. Williamson's motive.

Example 3 - Scene 3 from Lang's *difficulty of crossing a field*
String quartet rhythmic pattern
m. 1



It is especially significant when Williamson Girl sings her mother's motive on p. 59, m. 313, admonishing her father for not talking to the horses "about the history of horses and about the mysteries of Selma Alabama." As when Mrs. Williamson sang her motive in m. 161, the Williamson Girl also sings Mrs. Williamson's motive in G minor and with the altered rhythmic version. Once again, both Mrs. Williamson and her daughter singing Mrs. Williamson's motive demonstrates that they are aware of supernatural and disturbing elements in Selma, which Mr. Williamson ignores at his own peril.

Mrs. Williamson's motive is so important that Lang employs it movingly two times without Mrs. Williamson herself even singing it or being present in the scenes. In both Scene 5 and the "Wordless Prayer of Thanks" Scene, the slave chorus sings a vocalise version of Mrs. Williamson's motive in its original E minor key. In Scene 5, p. 108, m. 97, the slaves hum Mrs. Williamson's motive slowly over which Andrew and the Magistrate speak. During this passage, Andrew describes the slaves' accounts of what happened to Mr. Williamson as "monstrous and grotesque fictions" and "fictions originating with the blacks," which is how the Magistrate and Andrew justify dismissing the slaves' testimonies. The slaves humming underneath this conversation contrasts how little regard, Andrew, a white slaveowner, feels for his slaves, compared with the enslaved people's own humanity.

In the "Wordless Prayer of Thanks," the slave chorus sings the same four part harmonized version of Mrs. Williamson's motive as in Scene 5, m. 97. However, in their prayer, they sing slightly slower, and they sing a vocalise rather than humming. Lang notes in the score that this wordless prayer is "sung by everyone except Mrs. Williamson, including [the] string quartet." Although Mrs. Williamson does not sing in the "Wordless Prayer of Thanks," having everyone

sing her motive in her key of E minor sets the stage both dramatically and harmonically for her return in the following Scene 7.

In Scene 7, Lang separates Mrs. Williamson's motive from Scene 1's quartet ostinato. The quartet's ostinato that so prominently alternated with Mrs. Williamson's motive in Scene 1 returns later and somewhat unexpectedly in Scene 7 on p. 140, m. 136. However, Mrs. Williamson does not sing in this section of Scene 7 with the return of the quartet ostinato. Instead, Sam and Virginia Creeper discuss again what they saw happen to Mr. Williamson. The slave chorus repeatedly interjects in unison "we all know (what happened to him)" every four to five measures starting in m. 151. It is especially moving when the violin 1 plays the return of Mrs. Williamson Motive A and the viola plays Mrs. Williamson Motive B from Scene 1 in m. 164, while the violin 2 and cello continue the ostinato and the chorus sings "we all know."

Mrs. Williamson herself does not actually return in the scene until m. 197. She sings a slower version of her Motive B with a dotted quarter note rhythm three times in m. 197, 201, and 205 while singing "That's what I am saying." Underneath Virginia Creeper and Sam both sing in harmonized rhythmic unison, "what has become of Mister Williamson?" while the slaves continue singing in unison "We all know" from m. 151. The return of Mrs. Williamson's motive, and Sam and Virginia's interjections, with the addition of the slave chorus again showcases that all the people without any power - the women and enslaved people - know what happened to Mr. Williamson, but they are ignored.

Scene 7 dramatically shifts textures in m. 214, suddenly returning to Mrs. Williamson singing a cappella as the scene began. Although the two phrases in m. 214 and 219 are clearly in E minor, continuing Mrs. Williamson's main motivic key, Lang interestingly chooses not to use

her main melody to conclude the scene. It is also notable that Mrs. Williamson's final phrase is "this [Mr. Williamson's disappearance] is a fiction and I am not who I am." The remark further highlights Lang's statement that without her husband, Mrs. Williamson completely lacks her own identity or sense of self.

Mrs. Williamson's motive is a unifying melody that recurs throughout the opera reflecting her character's importance. When Mrs. Williamson sings her motive alone, it showcases her anguish and isolation caused by her husband's disappearance. However, her motive serves additional dramatic functions when she sings it during other characters' testimonies, such as her daughter's, adding credibility to the Williamson Girl's seemingly nonsensical statements. It also creates additional dramatic importance when other characters besides Mrs. Williamson sing her motive, such as the slave chorus, demonstrating her omnipresence throughout the opera.

Seemingly random phrases and the recurring harmonic progression

1. "I forgot to tell ___ about the horses"

Although Mrs. Williamson's motive recurs the most frequently, Lang and Wellman repeat several other text phrases, some of which are spoken and some that are sung. These recurring expressions do not always make sense initially or have great significance. However, they become crucial as they recur, providing clues about what potentially happened to Mr. Williamson. Many of the phrases become important in Scenes 4 and 6 when Sam describes the disappearance and in Interlude 3, Mr. Williamson's vanishment itself. In all three scenes, Sam

and Mr. Williamson repeat many of the expressions, with Interlude 3 and Scene 6 serving almost as culminations of all the phrases stated throughout the opera.

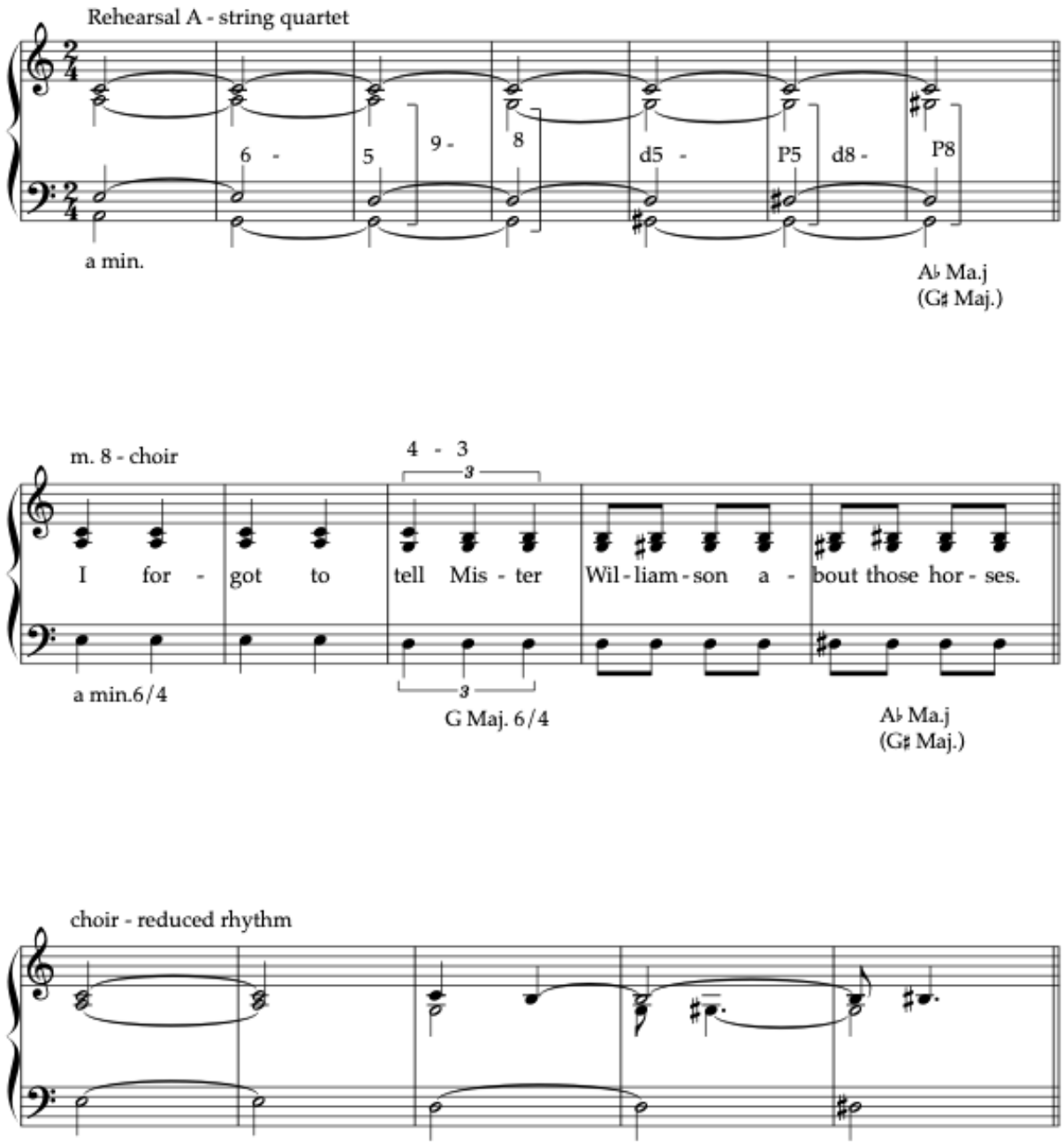
One of the first "clues" occurs in Scene 2 with the phrase, "I forgot to tell Mister Williamson about those horses." The scene begins with the testimony of Mr. Williamson's neighbor, Armour Wren, to the Magistrate. Underneath Wren's statement, the quartet plays a recurring harmonic pattern. The chorus highlights the expression "I forgot to tell Mister Williamson about those horses," by singing the text with the same harmonic progression the string quartet performs throughout the scene. The score notes that the quartet should play slowly and "not metronomic," creating a free, unmeasured sound. They repeat this seven measure pattern as necessary throughout Wren and the Magistrate's dialogue. Wren first speaks the remark during his testimony to the Magistrate on p. 36, and then the chorus sings the same phrase on p. 37 in m. 8.

Example 4 demonstrates that the repeating harmonic pattern is essentially a series of slowly moving suspensions and a slow common-tone modulation from A minor to G# Major/Ab Major. On p. 36, rehearsal A, the quartet begins by playing an A minor chord. The pattern ends in m. 7 on a G# Major chord with the violin 1 sustaining a C (enharmonically spelled B#) throughout the entire progression. The rest of the quartet sinuously and individually moves from A minor to Ab Major.

Lang re-employs the same (or very similar) harmonic pattern in the chorus on p. 37, m. 8 when they sing Wren's previously spoken phrase, "I forgot to tell Mister Williamson about those horses." As with the quartet's pattern, the choir sings an A minor triad and ends the phrase on a G# Major/Ab Major triad. However, the choir performs the progression much faster, more than

twice the speed than the quartet. In addition, Lang employs a different voicing for the choir versus the quartet. The choir sings the phrase with second inversion chords while the quartet plays with root position chords. The choir also moves together more rhythmically than the quartet, while in the string quartet's version, each note changes individually.

Example 4 - Scene 2 from Lang's *difficulty of crossing a field*
Recurring harmonic pattern



The first time Armour Wren says the phrase, “I forgot to tell Mister Williamson about those horses,” the score instructs the choir to sing immediately after Wren finishes speaking, suddenly cutting off the strings. As soon as the choir finishes singing Wren’s phrase, the quartet resumes its pattern. Wren and the Magistrate continue speaking as before, as if nothing occurred. Having the choir sing the phrases Wren speaks during his testimony highlights for the audience their importance.

When Wren and the Magistrate resume speaking, Wren clarifies this strange phrase’s meaning. Wren was scheduled to deliver horses to Mr. Williamson, but could not deliver them until the following day. As Wren passed Mr. Williamson in the carriage, Wren realized he forgot to relay this information to Williamson, thus causing Wren to say the expression. As Wren turned his carriage around, he saw Williamson disappear. This seemingly bizarre phrase is what caused Wren to witness Williamson’s disappearance firsthand. Wren is one of the few witnesses whose testimony is actually deemed credible, due to his status as a white man.

The choir sings repetitions of Wren's spoken text several times throughout the scene in m. 20, 31, and 42. As with the initial “I forgot to tell Mr. Williamson about those horses,” the choir features a similar harmonic pattern as the quartet. The choir’s repetitions culminates when Wren’s son cries, “Why, father, what has become of Mister Williamson?” The choir reaches its apogee in m. 54 when they repeat Wren’s son’s exclamation. However, there are several key differences between m. 54’s repetition of Wren’s statement versus the previous choral recurrence. Unlike all the other previous choral reiterations, which were marked with a *mp* dynamic, m. 54 is marked with a *f* dynamic. In addition, the choir sings its highest version of the pattern. They have the same voicing as the quartet, but an octave higher, making the phrase sound more

dramatic in the singers' higher registers. Further in m. 54, the choir sings the closest to the quartet's harmonic pattern, while the previous choir repetitions were more altered. The change in dynamics, registers, and voicing in m. 54 reflect Wren's and his son's astonishment and shock from Mr. Williamson's inexplicable disappearance.

Although the initial phrase "I forgot to tell Mr. Williamson about those horses" is only briefly stated in Scene 2, it becomes increasingly important throughout the opera. The expression returns at the end of Scene 3, on p. 68. Strangely this time, it's Mr. Williamson who says, "I forgot to tell Andrew about those horses." Unlike Wren in Scene 2, who eventually remembers what he meant by this seemingly strange phrase, the audience does not learn what Williamson meant to tell his brother, Andrew.

In Scene 4 on p. 73, m. 37, Sam confirms that both Williamson and Wren said the same phrase. However, unlike the previous iterations of this expression, Sam's is the first time a character sings it. In addition, in m. 45-48, Sam notes how Wren's son also heard his father say the same thing to tell Mr. Williamson. As in Scene 2, in Scene 4, the choir again reiterates key phrases that Sam sings. However until m. 50, the choir only sings a brief one measure repetition. Only when Sam again sings the crucial text about the horses of which both Wren and Williamson spoke, does the choir repeat the entire expression. Previously the choir waited to repeat Sam's phrase until he finished singing. In m. 50, however, the two phrases elide, with the choir entering before Sam even finishes. Similar to Scene 2's climax, in Scene 4's culminating moment in m. 54, the choir sings a louder *f* dynamic to highlight this phrase's importance. Lang again employs the same important harmonic progression that choir and quartet perform in Scene 2, but he transposes it down a whole step to begin on a G minor chord. Through repetition, the

phrase “I forgot to tell ____ about those horses” is transformed from a seemingly nonsensical expression to a key moment that caused Wren, his son, and Sam to witness the disappearance.

2. “We are Building a Nation”

Another phrase that seems possibly random but becomes important later and is sung with the string quartet’s recurring harmonic progression from Scene 2 is “We are building a nation.” As with the text “I forgot to tell ___ about the horses,” this phrase is also first spoken and then later sung by the choir. “We are building a nation” at first seems out of context to the audience. Previously Virginia Creeper individually introduced the enslaved people in m. 64-92 when in m. 93, she first speaks, “We are building a nation.” She says this phrase three times in m. 93, 100, and 107, followed by the phrase, "We are building an erasure” in m. 114. Whenever the text recurs, “We are building a nation” is always repeated three times followed by “We are building an erasure.” When I asked Lang about the phrase’s significance, he responded, “Personally, I feel we’re always building a nation.” He interpreted Wellman’s text as demonstrating how society unites to punish Mr. Williamson, who more broadly represents the slave-owning system as a whole, for the sins of slavery.[38]

Similar to “I forgot to tell ___ about the horses,” the phrase “we are building a nation” returns in Scene 4 during Sam’s telling, with the choir singing the same harmonic progression the quartet first plays in Scene 2. As in m. 54, in m. 62, the choir again sings the phrase transposed in G minor. The choir then sings the phrase much later in the scene on p. 96, m. 208. Having the choir dramatically sing in Scene 4 those two key phrases, “We are building a nation” and “I

[38] Lang interview.

forgot to tell Mr. Williamson about those horses" when they were only spoken in previous scenes, highlights that the slaves know what happened to Mr. Williamson, although those in power won't listen.

The most surprising recurrence of "We are building a nation" occurs in Scene 5 when Williamson's brother, Andrew, describes Mr. Williamson's repugnant views on managing his slaves. By p. 112, Andrew no longer sings, having completely lost his composure as he shouts the phrase, "We are building a nation" three times followed by "We are building an erasure." It is significant that a white male character shouts the phrase that previously only enslaved people spoke or sang. When the enslaved people employed the expression, it suggested that they envisioned a new world without slavery. However, Andrew utilizing the phrase suggests that he foresees a much more horrific new society where slavery still continues.

The quartet and choir reflect this more somber reinterpretation of the phrase. While previously in the scene, when Andrew sings Williamson's and his own horrific views towards slavery, the quartet plays much slower music, marked in the score "with pomposity." However, the entire scene's timbre, texture, and mood dramatically transform multiple times, including when Andrew shouts the phrase "we are building a nation." Lang employs such a jarring texture change in the quartet to reflect Andrew's horrific views and his intensity as he screams them.

3. "Saw him throw away the stump of his cigar"

Another phrase that initially seems inconsequential, but becomes increasingly important through its repetition is whether Mr. Williamson threw away the stump of his cigar as he walked down the open field from which he then mysteriously disappeared. In Scene 2 during the neighbor Armour Wren's testimony on p. 40, Wren speaks, "Just before the…ah, event [disappearance]…he [Williamson] threw away the stump of a cigar." Wren states that this is his final image of Williamson. As mentioned previously, while Wren speaks this text, the quartet plays its recurring slow harmonic pattern underneath.

Similar to "I forgot to tell Mr. Williamson about those horses," Wren speaks the phrase during his testimony in Scene 2, but the text becomes more important later in Scene 4 when Sam sings it. On p. 70, m. 18, Sam sings "saw him [Williamson] throw away the stump of his cigar," and the chorus repeats "his cigar" in m. 19. Throughout Scene 4, Sam sings a short phrase describing what he saw of Mr. Williamson, which the choir repeats in the following measure.

Sam also introduces an additional action he saw Williamson perform before his disappearance that becomes increasingly important. On p. 72, m. 30, Sam sings that he saw Williamson "pluck a flower or did he top it with a stick," and once again, the choir repeats the phrase in m. 31. It's interesting that Sam introduces this final action with a slight confusion. He is uncertain whether Williamson plucked the flower or topped it; however in m. 34, Sam confirms that he saw Williamson in fact pluck the flower.

4. “What’s the point of talking crap like that?”

Another seemingly unimportant expression occurs in Scene 3 before Mr. Williamson’s disappearance when he says to his daughter, “What’s the point of talking that crap” on p. 47, m. 94. Throughout Scene 3, the Williamson Girl sings strange ideas to her parents about not talking to the horses and discussing the mysteries of Selma, Alabama. While Mrs. Williamson is more receptive to her daughter's seemingly nonsensical thoughts, Mr. Williamson dismisses them with his negative responses.

Similarly at the end of Scene 3 on p. 68, the Williamson Girl reads to her parents her eccentric poem about someone or something carrying a candle in the night, which is then blown out. As mentioned previously, the Williamson Girl later believes her poem unintentionally predicted her father’s disappearance. However, immediately after reading her poem, Mr. Williamson responds with a similar line as before, “What’s the point of writing down nonsense like that?”

Culmination of numerous phrases in Interlude 3 the Disappearance and Scene 6

After hearing about the disappearance from numerous witnesses and seeing moments from before the vanishment, finally in Interlude 3, the audience sees the central event itself from Mr. Williamson’s perspective. His disappearance is a culmination of numerous phrases that other characters stated when he also speaks these texts. As discussed previously, Lang utilizes the music from the opera’s beginning, and notably, Mr. Williamson does not sing.

The quartet begins playing alone the Opening Scene's music until around m. 17 when Mr. Williamson first speaks “What is the point of talking crap like that?” This is the same dismissive

expression he said after his daughter's seemingly bizarre statement about not talking to horses and strange transformations. Beginning the scene with this phrase situates Mr. Williamson's disappearance shortly after this incident with his daughter.

During the second repeat of m. 1-20, Williamson states that he "threw away the stump of my cigar." Both Wren and Sam mentioned previously they saw Williamson throw away his cigar stump, and it is Wren's final visual of Williamson. This text again contextualizes for the audience that they are experiencing the pivotal moment of Williamson's disappearance.

During the second repeat at approximately m. 13, Williamson also says one of the more crucial lines of text, "Something about those horses I had forgotten to remember to tell." Then later during the second repeat of m. 17, Williamson says, "To tell someone…" and in m. 21 "To tell something…" It is interesting how during the disappearance itself, Williamson is unsure of who or what he was supposed to relay about the horses. Likewise, in m. 33, Williamson states, "I walked slowly across the field and plucked a flower, or did I top it with a stick." Sam sang this text in Scene 4, and it is notable that he had the same confusion. Perhaps having Williamson repeat Sam and Wren's uncertainties indicates that Mr. Williamson is so consumed with whatever causes his disappearance that he too cannot recall his trivial worldly concerns.

In addition to reiterating previous expressions, Mr. Williamson also introduces new seemingly nonsensical statements that are only later clarified. Two times during his vanishment, Mr. Williamson says, "I had no reason to think she had at that time lost her mind." He speaks this phrase during the second repetition of m. 1 and again in m. 39. Similarly, in m. 45, Williamson says "He's gone, she said, he's gone." The audience does not know who "she" is until Scene 7 when they learn he's referring to his wife. Mrs. Williamson begins the scene

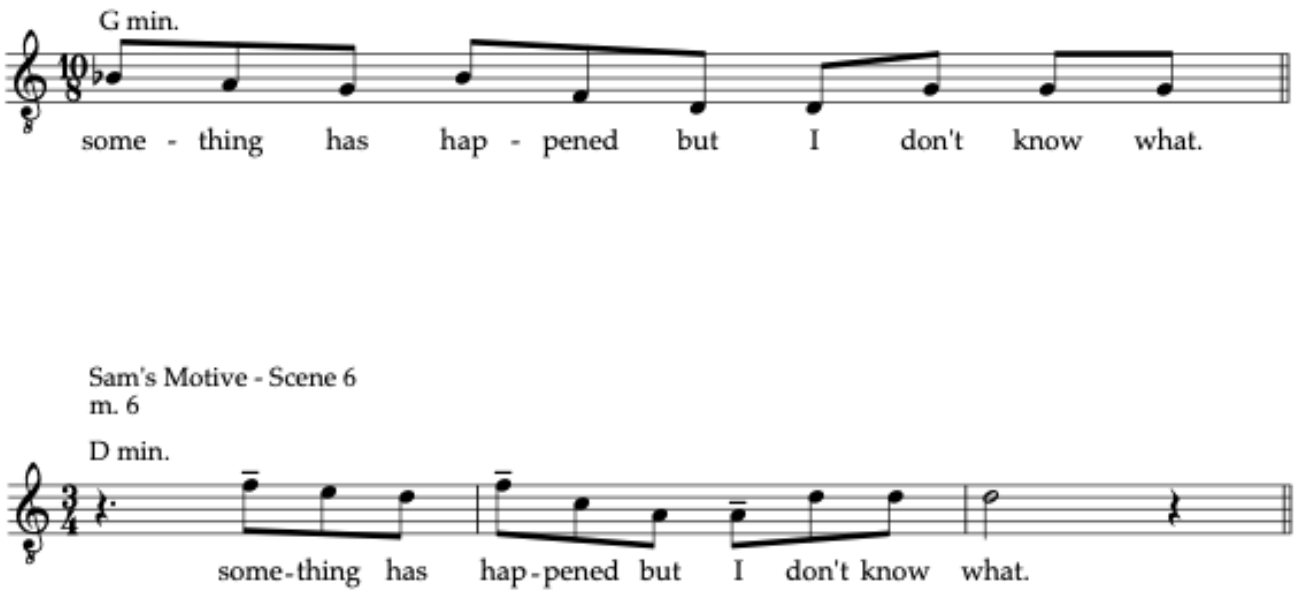
singing her main E minor motive a cappella. She sings the same text as her husband spoke "I had no reason to think I had at the time lost my mind." Then in m. 29, the listener learns that Mr. Williamson heard his wife shouting post-disappearance, "He is gone" when she sings the same phrase. Mrs. Williamson's sung repetition of "He is gone" is one of the opera's most moving moments. Unlike Mrs. Williamson, who sings these phrases with such pathos, Mr. Williamson calmly speaks these texts in Interlude 3, as if observing his own disappearance from a distance. Similar to the confusions Mr. Williamson has earlier in the scene about his own actions - what to tell someone about the horses and whether he topped a flower or plucked it - perhaps Williamson's indifference to his wife's exclamations also demonstrates that he is too consumed by whatever caused his disappearance to consider how his absence affects his loved ones.

Even more so than Mr. Williamson's disappearance in Interlude 3, Scene 6 is a musical culmination of many phrases previously heard during the opera. Throughout the entire scene, the Williamson Girl repeatedly sings the phrase her father previously said in response to her poem of, "What is the point of talking crap like that?" Between each sung statement of the expression, she also speaks aloud one of her family's slaves' names, referencing Scene 1 in which Virginia Creeper first said them.

After the first time the Williamson Girl sings the phrase alone, Sam enters in m. 6. Similar to the Williamson Girl, Sam also restates previous questions and confusions of what he saw during Mr. Williamson's disappearance from his Scene 4. Although Lang alters the Williamson Girl's melody throughout the scene, given that her sung text remains identical, her melody almost functions as part of the string quartet's ostinato. Sam has more variety with his text, causing the listener to focus more on him.

In fact, Scene 6 functions somewhat as a musical reinterpretation of Sam's previous Scene 4. As demonstrated in Example 5, Sam's melody in both Scenes 4 and 6 are the same, but Lang transposes Sam's motive to D minor in Scene 6 from its original G minor key in Scene 4. Although in Scene 4, Sam is originally notated in a triple meter, while in Scene 6 Sam is written in a duple 3/4 meter, the listener still hears Sam as singing in a triple meter due to Lang stressing every third eighth note. Thus, Scene 6 features a dichotomy between Sam's reinterpreted triple meter melody from Scene 4 against the string quartet's haunting simple meter ostinato.

Example 5 - Scene 4 from Lang's *difficulty of crossing a field*



In m. 6-44, Sam sings the same statements and questions in the same order as he sang in Scene 4: “Something has happened but I don’t know what,” “saw him [Williamson] throw away the stump of his cigar,” “saw him stroll real leisurely down that garden path,” “saw him stroll down that gravel walk,” and “saw him pluck a flower as he went or did he top it with a stick?”

In addition to adding the Williamson Girl’s recurring melody to Scene 6, the biggest changes from the original Scene 4 are the tempo, the lack of the choir and the quartet’s ostinato. Unlike Scene 4, the choir does not repeat Sam’s statements in Scene 6. Most notably, the tempo is much slower in Scene 6 than Scene 4. In Scene 4, the tempo was much more dance-like with the dotted quarter note equaling 60 (eighth note equals 180.) In Scene 6, the tempo is slower with quarter note equals 72 (eighth note equals 144.)

However the quartet’s ostinato is what most dramatically changes Scene 6’s mood from that of Scene 4’s. In Scene 4, the quartet rhythmically doubles Sam’s melody, creating a dance-like feel throughout his aria. In comparison, in Scene 6, the string quartet usually plays in a clear 3/4 time (with occasional 5/8 measures), creating a polyrhythmic contrast between Sam’s lilting slower dance-like melody versus the more somber 3/4 ostinato. Lang further varies the two scenes timbrally by having the quartet play muted with no vibrato in Scene 6, creating a hushed, haunted sound. The quartet consistently plays a three bar ostinato. Each measure of the ostinato begins with a stepwise scalar ascent. The cello sustains the downbeat, the viola sustains the second note of the rising scale, and the violin 2 sustains the third note of the scale. The three instruments sustaining lower notes in the scalar ascent creates a pedal-like sound, while the violin 1 continues its ascent. The only real variation is the occasional 5/8 measures and on which note the violin 1 ends its ascent. Only on p. 132, m. 116 does Lang vary the quartet’s ostinato by

removing the cello. Then in the scene's final measure, only the violin 1 plays its ascending scalar melody while Sam sings, "that's what I think." Scene 6 is a musical reinterpretation of Sam's previous Scene 4. Both Sam and the Williamson Girl are haunted by their questions over what happened to Mr. Williamson, repeatedly replaying in their minds his disappearance and the moments right before the event.

In Scene 7, after Mrs. Williamson's haunting solo aria, all the characters whose testimonies are dismissed unite on p. 137 to further discuss what they saw of Mr. Williamson's disappearance. In particular, the Williamson Girl is wracked with guilt over her father's vanishment. She questions if she caused it when she says to Sam, "I hope people will not think I wished for it [the disappearance] to happen, Sam. I did not wish for it to happen." Her statement references Scene 3, in which the Williamson Girl said to her father that he had not spoken to the horses. She again references her seemingly strange phrase, and the choir highlights the expression's significance when they sing her statement in m. 104 "you have not talked to the horses about the history of horses and the mysteries of Selma." The choir again utilizes the same harmonic progression as the in Scene 2, which the quartet first played in their slow ostinato. Once again, by concluding with the Williamson Girl's phrase and the choir, it demonstrates her prescience and how those in power refuse to listen to the slaves, who actually have an idea of what happened to Mr. Williamson.

Role of Interludes/String Quartet Solos

There are numerous sections where the quartet plays alone. Similar to how Lang and Wellman employ seemingly strange or inconsequential expressions that later through repetitions become more significant for their relationship to Mr. Williams' disappearance, several of the instrumental interludes also become increasingly more important throughout the opera. As mentioned previously, the opera begins with the quartet playing alone and later in Interlude 3, Lang repeats this music for the crucial scene of Williamson's disappearance.

However, the most surprising quartet solo that later becomes more significant is the beginning of Scene 4. The original quartet passage only lasts 12 measures. It consists mostly of resolving suspensions that move from a P5 to predominantly a M6 interval between the violin 1 and viola. The suspension pattern ends in m. 3 when violin 1 and viola instead move to a P4 and then move to an even more dissonant tritone in m. 4. The tritone tension resolves when the violin 1 moves up to a D in m. 5, resolving the tritone to a P5 and setting the stage for the pattern to repeat again in m. 7.

The ostinato is also notable for the violin 1's frequent register leaps, regularly jumping from its mid-register to its lowest open G string within an eighth note and then returning to its mid-register again. When the pattern repeats in m. 7, the big difference is the addition of the violin 2, which reiterates a series of D octave leaps. Particularly notable is the extra tension the violin 2's D causes in m. 10 with the m2 dissonance between the two violins.

After this twelve measure quartet ostinato, the rest of Scene 4 is very different in character with its much faster, more dance-like nature. This opening quartet solo's brief nature would cause most to think of it as an intro for Scene 4, and Lang even labels it, "slow,

mysterious intro." However the quartet solo unexpectedly returns in Scene 7, first on p. 136, m. 92 and then again on p. 139, m. 117. The first quartet solo repetition in m. 92 is nearly identical to Scene 4's, but Lang switches which members of the quartet play the specific voices. In addition, Lang skips part of the quartet's original ostinato, having them play the same music as Scene 4 in m. 7 rather than at the beginning in m. 1.

When the quartet solo first repeats in Scene 7 in m. 92, it is an abrupt change from Mrs. Williamson's violin 1 duet. Mrs. Williamson and the violin have a G.P. with a fermata in m. 91. Then in m. 92, when the quartet returns with its ostinato, the Williamson Girl speaks, and it states in the score she should whisper and be "eerily amplified." She whispers "someone something knows something" referring to Mr. Williamson's disappearance, but "will not tell."

While the ostinato in m. 92 again is only twelve measures as the original intro, when it returns in Scene 7 on p. 139 in m. 117, it lasts 17 measures. As with m. 92, the quartet again begins the pattern in the middle, playing the same music as in Scene 4, m. 7 rather than starting with the ostinato's opening. In addition, Lang adds the cello playing short eighth notes on the downbeat in m. 117. Lang then further develops the ostinato in m. 123 when the cello begins to play dramatic two octave leaps in each measure. Finally, in the third statement of the ostinato in m. 129, Lang creates his biggest addition to the ostinato yet with the violin 2's dramatic eighth note pattern. The violin 2 plays a series of eighth notes that features a two note pattern, then repeat an octave lower, and then a leap of a P4, P5 or tritone that returns the violin 2 back to its higher register.

As with Scene 7, m. 92, again in m. 117 the Williamson Girl speaks during the quartet's ostinato. There were numerous changes musically and dramatically since the Williamson Girl

last spoke with the ostinato underneath in m. 92: the Williamson Girl, Sam, and Mrs. Williamson all speak to each other, the choir sings in m. 104, and again the trio, along with several slaves, speaks on p. 138. However, when the ostinato returns in m. 117, the Williamson Girl continues speaking as if she were uninterrupted. She states that during her father's disappearance, she did not look at him, but rather looked at the sky. In m. 129, she claims that there is someone or something who will not speak of what happened to Mr. Williamson.

Eventually during the quartet's second repetition of their ostinato, the audience realizes that it represents the Williamson Girl's thoughts about her father's disappearance. The Closing Scene on p. 147 further solidifies the connection when Lang presents the most developed version of the ostinato yet. The Williamson Girl again is the focus of this ostinato, but unlike the prior versions, this time she sings in m. 232 while the quartet plays. As mentioned previously, she sings the same poem she read aloud earlier in Scene 3 on p. 68, which Mr. Williamson dismissed as "nonsense."

Previously when the Williamson Girl spoke, Lang marked in the score that she should be eerily amplified to create a haunting and disturbing effect. Although in m. 232 it is not marked if she should be amplified when she sings, Lang still creates a frightening sound by utilizing the singer's lowest register. Each phrase ends with her singing "in broad daylight" on a low G, which is an incredibly low and quiet note for most sopranos. (Many sopranos would not even be able to produce such a low note.) She sings this phrase in m. 237, 243, 249, and ends the entire opera with the phrase in m. 255. Each time she sings this text, Lang purposefully stops the quartet, partially to create a haunting sound of her singing alone, but also to avoid overpowering the singer. Ending the opera with the Williamson Girl singing her poem highlights her

prescience over her father's disappearance and again demonstrates that those with any ideas of what happened to Mr. Williamson are ignored. Thus, Lang transforms a quartet solo that initially seems like an unrelated intro for the rest of Scene 4 into the opera's final closing statement.

Conclusions

Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field* explicitly utilizes unreliable narrators to depict multiple but incomplete versions of the same event, Mr. Williamson's disappearance. Lang and Wellman explore Jann Pasler's non-narrative structure by shifting between various chronological moments before, after, and during Mr. Williamson's vanishment and featuring multiple characters' repetition of expressions that initially appear inconsequential but gradually become pivotal moments before and during the disappearance. Although the opera demonstrates that the enslaved people and the Williamson Girl have an idea of what happened to Mr. Williamson, they are ignored by those in power, who are the Magistrate and Mr. Williamson's brother.

Chapter 3 - Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*

Creating an ensemble of Isabelle Eberharts through the chorus and electronics

As mentioned previously, despite Mazzoli utilizing a chorus, the protagonist, Isabelle Eberhart, is the only concrete character depicted in *Song from the Uproar*. Though directors may feature other roles in their staging, such as Eberhart's husband and her family, ultimately, Eberhart is the only character whom the audience truly sees and hears. In my interview with Mazzoli, she discussed featuring Eberhart exclusively:

> "All the text that you hear is meant to be from Isabelle's point of view or is an extrapolation, an interpretation of lines in her journals. Again it was this idea of not wanting to put words in her mouth and not wanting to create dialogue between her and her husband or her and her father. Something about that felt really wrong. There was something more magical about sticking to what was in her journals."[39]

Though Mazzoli's avoidance of other characters creates challenges for narrative progression and musical variety, she still creates an array of musical timbres by employing an "ensemble of Eberharts" in both the chorus and the electronics. The electronics are crucial throughout the opera, often functioning as an instrument equal to the rest of the ensemble. One of the main ways Mazzoli creates an "Eberhart-ensemble" is through electronic pre-recorded voice(s) of her. The opera begins with her pre-recorded voice that is purposefully distorted to sound like an old vinyl record rather than a live singer. As Mazzoli stated about the electronics:

> "I knew that they [the electronics] would be vocally based and that I wanted to create the illusion that there were more singers than there are onstage. So most of the electronic elements are vocal. It also created this feeling of being unmoored from a specific time. When you have crackly, vinyl static…there's certain electronic sounds that were not present in Isabelle's time but from our perspective in the 21st century evoke a sense of the past and a sense of nostalgia and memory.

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[39] Mazzoli interview.

> That was more important to me than being historically accurate…Her life was so big and so varied and strange that I wanted to create a sense…that seemed to go beyond the elements on stage."[40]

A listener might expect the live soloist Isabelle to be the main focal point whenever she sings with the "Eberhardt-ensemble." However, Mazzoli often purposefully employs the live Eberhardt as only one member of the ensemble rather than a prominent soloist. For example, in the Overture, Mazzoli exclusively features the pre-recorded voice until m. 35, when finally the live Isabelle enters. Even after she joins, she sings a duet with her pre-recorded electronic self rather than singing as the soloist with an electronic accompaniment. The duo builds to an even larger Isabelle ensemble on p. 4, m. 62, rehearsal F when the chorus joins both the live and pre-recorded Isabelles. Rather than employing the full chorus, Mazzoli utilizes only the choir's female singers to create an even larger "Isabelle-ensemble."

The live Isabelle continues as a member of the ensemble in m. 62. Her part is neither higher nor louder than that of the rest of the chorus. The soprano 1 and Isabelle often sing a canon delayed by two beats with each other. In fact, sometimes the soprano 1 and electronics' parts are higher than Isabelle's, such as at m. 71.

Similarly, in Scene 3 "Capsized Heart," the choir again functions as a continuation of Isabelle's thoughts from the previous scene. The chorus begins the scene performing the same motive Isabelle sang in Scene 2 "Death moves his hands through me again," although now Mazzoli transposes the melody from its original C# Phrygian/minor melody on p. 14, m. 14. It is notable that Scene 3 begins with the chorus' alto singing the main motive because she sounds the most similar to Isabelle's mezzo voice, again blurring the separation between the chorus and

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[40] Mazzoli interview.

Isabelle. Mazzoli layers the alto, tenor, and soprano 2, gradually building the texture. There are key moments that Mazzoli purposefully obscures the chorus and soloist roles to create the "Isabelle-ensemble" sound. For example, in Scene 3 in m. 23-30, the soprano 1 is more prominent with her higher register, while Isabelle doubles the lower soprano 2 and alto.

In the Overture and Scene 3, I believe that Mazzoli employs the chorus both to vary the timbre, but also to provide a rest for Isabelle. In particular by Scene 3, Isabelle performed a solo aria in the previous scene. As the only character in the opera, it would be vocally exhausting for the singer to constantly sing. Featuring the choir (and sometimes electronics) as the focal point provides opportunities for the soloist to rest.

The electronics Eberhardt-ensemble culminates in Scene 8 "I am not Mine." The Overture's pre-recorded electronic vocal part returns with its crackly distorted vinyl recording sound. Although the opening melody is repeated, it's not an exact restatement of the Overture, because of the flute and clarinet's frequent sextuplet interjections every few measures in m. 6, 9, 10, 12, and 14. Mazzoli employs an additional pre-recorded electronic voice beginning in m. 6. Around m. 10, the second pre-recorded voice becomes more distorted, and it morphs into a regularly pulsing chordal texture. By m. 16, the electronic voices are transformed into a pulsing accompaniment, enabling the live Isabelle to enter at m. 16.

Mazzoli transforms the Opening Scene's pre-recorded vocal part into a four part electronic choir that permeates throughout the aria. It functions similar to a backup chorus in pop music, but a purposefully artificially sounding ensemble, almost like a synthesizer keyboard. In this aria, Isabelle discusses falling in love with her eventual husband. Mazzoli references the pop ballad genre through the electronic backup choir while still making the aria her own style.

The composer continues the texture of the live Isabelle with the backup electronic voices until m. 56, when the highest electronic voice returns to a more "human" timbre. However, it still sounds echoic and distorted, as if playing a recording from a distance. The pre-recorded voice repeats the phrase "I am not mine," with which the live Isabelle originally began her aria. The highest electronic voice remains the primary melody that begins in m. 56 and lasts until the aria's conclusion, where it fades away to niente.

The scene ends without the live Isabelle returning. The electronics are transformed throughout the scene, from originally a repetition of the Overture, to an essential chordal texture of the aria as the backup pop ballad. Perhaps finishing Scene 8 without the soloist and the electronic voice as the primary focus musically depicts how even Isabelle's voice is not her own, but rather a part of her husband.

Additional Roles of the Chorus and Electronics

In addition to creating an Isabelle ensemble through the chorus and electronics, Mazzoli employs these forces to create a few separate "characters"[41] and to depict key moments in Isabelle's life that don't feature the live singer. For example, in Scene 4 Interlude, Mazzoli exclusively utilizes the electronics and clarinet to portray Isabelle leaving her homeland and sailing to Algeria.

Mazzoli subtly blurs the electronics' entrance, ending the previous Scene 3 with the piano gradually building up from a single note in m. 52 to a large cluster chord by m. 69. With the instrument's sustain pedal employed throughout this passage, the piano's final cluster chord

[41] The term character is loosely used.

creates a long rich echo, underneath which Scene 4's electronics discreetly enter. Though the live Isabelle does not sing, the composer still references and layers quotations of her music from the two previous scenes, in particular pre-recorded fragments of the motive "Death moves his hands through me again." She focuses on the word "again," mimicking the text through its repetition. As with the Overture and Scene 8, the pre-recorded electronics once again sound blurry. However, unlike in the previous scenes' electronics that sound like a scratched vinyl record, in Scene 4, they are more echoic, simulating the listener hearing them in the distance.

As mentioned, only the clarinet performs in Scene 4, and Isabelle does not sing, providing an opportunity for her to rest. However, even without a live singer, Mazzoli musically depicts Isabelle's journey to Algeria by incorporating sea sounds in the electronics. As with other scenes that prominently feature electronics, Mazzoli once again creates nostalgic sounds. However in Scene 4, she creates a sentimental feeling and an Isabelle ensemble by quoting earlier scenes, instead of employing the live Isabelle.

Another method Mazzoli features the chorus to depict key dramatic moments is employing it almost as part of the instrumental ensemble. Although she does not utilize the chorus frequently in this manner, when she does, they are particularly notable and occur in crucial moments. The first instrumental use of the chorus occurs in Scene 3 "Capsized Heart" on p. 2, rehearsal A, m. 7-16 and again on p. 5, m. 19-29. The choir's tenor and bass sing the same accompanying melody as the bass clarinet in the previous scene, Scene 2 "This World Within Me is too Small" in m. 6, except the melody is now transposed a whole step higher to G# minor from the original bass clarinet melody in F# minor. Mazzoli even marks in the score that the tenor and bass are "echoing [the] bass clarinet from [the] previous section." As mentioned, Scene 3

functions as a continuation of Scene 2 with the choir singing main motives from the prior scene. Mazzoli creates additional variety while utilizing earlier melodic ideas through varying the orchestration - in this case, having the tenor and bass sing a part that was originally performed by the ensemble.

Later in the opera, Mazzoli employs the chorus instrumentally to musically represent Isabelle's evasion of an assassination attempt. In Scene 14 "I am the Hunted," Mazzoli simultaneously repeats previous music, but also varies it by adding additional music in the chorus. She quotes a key phrase from Scene 5 "I have arrived." Scene 5's original melody and text depict Isabelle establishing her own identity in Algeria and thriving after her parents' deaths.

In Scene 14, the melody is the same as in Scene 5, but transposed down a half step. One of Scene 14's most climactic moments occurs on p. 8, m. 25, when Mazzoli repeats the phrase from Scene 5 where Isabelle sings "throw back my head." The composer discussed the decision to repeat this phrase for such a dramatic moment in Scene 14:

> "We're [Royce Vavrek, her librettist, and Mazzoli] always looking for material to reprise as a way of connecting things together. What really gave us the idea was the line 'throw back my head.'…In that moment, the assassin is trying to behead her. So this ecstatic "I will throw back my head and sing" [from Scene 5] becomes the thing that gets her in danger. I think there was that contrast of being carefree and being in danger and then the specific line of 'throw back my head and sing.'"[42]

However, it is not the repetition of Isabelle's melody from Scene 5 that musically demonstrates her danger, but rather the added choir and instrumental parts. In the original phrase of Scene 5, the choir does not sing, but in Scene 14, they perform phonemes and later use

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[42] Mazzoli interview.

sprechstimme. The soprano 1 and baritone are in rhythmic unison singing 16th notes, while the soprano 2, alto, and tenor perform contrasting rhythms.

In Scene 14's beginning, the entire choir sings, creating an intense ominous sound, but the listener can't discern the individual voices. Beginning in m. 21, Mazzoli employs the choral singers individually. She then layers their lines, first two at a time in m. 23, increasing the number of singers until m. 27, when the entire choir sings phonemes, crescendoing dramatically. The tension climaxes in m. 31, rehearsal D, when the choir together shouts "ah" precisely at the moment Isabelle dodges the assassin's blade.

In addition to utilizing the choir to depict Isabelle's danger, the piano also seems to convey her vulnerability. It plays low P5 intervals on downbeats in the left hand while the right hand performs high textures on the off beats. The piano's right hand is so high that it sounds percussive rather than pitched. Its righthand clusters become more frequent and the figures in the left hand climb higher with greater rhythmic intensity. The piano purposefully doesn't perform a clear "regular" beat pattern, further creating tension. Mazzoli transforms the same melody and text from Scene 5 and re-contextualizes it in Scene 14 through a more instrumental use of the choir and the piano. The dichotomy between Isabelle's carefree repetition of Scene 5's melody and text against the piano and choir's ominous music effectively depicts her danger.

Although there are numerous moments in which the chorus sings separately without Isabelle in a more "traditional" choral sound - i.e. harmonized with multiple melodic voices, as mentioned, the choir usually depicts Isabelle's internal thoughts or even creates additional Isabelles. However in Scene 9 "Chanson," the choir dramatically and musically functions as a character separate from Isabelle.

The scene is titled “Chanson,” the French word for song, and Mazzoli labels the tempo as a “Drunken, Bawdy Waltz.” The scene’s beginning prominently features the piano, creating a voice and piano song-like feeling that permeates throughout the scene. Scene 9 also creates a barroom setting, which the choir helps to create. After falling in love with her eventual husband in the previous scene, Isabelle is sadder in Scene 9 because they are often apart. Scene 9 contrasts the choir’s happiness with Isabelle’s own internal melancholy.

Though the choir performs alone in m. 14-23, 37-42 and 57-66, the chorus sings in unison in a lower, easier register that many non-musicians could sing, creating the feeling that “regular” people in a bar are singing rather than professional musicians. Mazzoli marks at the choir’s first entrance in rehearsal B “Lazy, a little sloppy,” again indicating that the chorus should not sound like professional musicians.

In m. 37-42, and 57-66, the choir sings in unison the same melody and text about cigarettes and anisette, a type of absinthe but sweeter, once again depicting the barroom. When Isabelle attempts to join the choir in m. 62, she purposefully sings a measure delayed from the choir. The scores that Isabelle should sound as if she were “Drunk! Trying to join [the] chorus but too drunk.”

The chorus switches between portraying the bar patrons versus Isabelle’s thoughts. In m. 69, Isabelle sings “Damn this happiness, damn my joy,” depicting her own misery while being surrounded by the bar’s happy customers. When musically reflecting Isabelle’s inner turmoil in m. 74-89, the choir suddenly switches to more complex music. Soprano 1 and alto in the choir perform in stretto Isabelle’s melody and text, and the choir sings in a much higher range. In fact,

the soprano 1's entrance is higher than Isabelle in m. 74. Once again, Mazzoli employs the choir as an Isabelle-ensemble by utilizing only female chorus members.

On p. 22, m. 95-102, rehearsal K, the scene's main refrain returns. However, Mazzoli does not simply repeat the simple homophonic refrain, but instead the choir sings in two part harmony, blurring whether the audience hears the chorus as the bar customers or as a reflection of Isabelle's thoughts. In addition, the piano, electric guitar, and double bass sing with the choir. Having the instrumentalists sing with the choir also blurs the distinction between the professional chorus versus this scene's more casual barroom sing-along sound.

Mazzoli further employs the chorus and the instrumentalists as separate characters by specifying staging instructions for both the ensemble and Isabelle towards Scene 9's conclusion. The score indicates for the instrumentalists to leave the stage. The clarinet exits in m. 107, and the flute in m. 114. The score does not specify if the electric guitar and double bass also exit, but they stop playing in m. 118. Given that the piano performs alone for the rest of the scene, one can assume they leave the stage, although this earlier version of the score does not indicate it. The pianist plays alone on p. 27, rehearsal M, m. 119 through the scene's end. Mazzoli repeats the scene's opening melody, and, featuring the piano alone with Isabelle at rehearsal N, once again creates the song-like feel after which the scene is titled.

On p. 28, m. 148, Mazzoli breaks the separation of the singers from the instrumentalists, when Isabelle joins the pianist in m. 148. She plays the same melody that the clarinet played on p. 2, rehearsal A in the scene's beginning. Eventually even the pianist exits the stage, ending Scene 9 with Isabelle singing and playing the piano alone. Mazzoli described the ensemble leaving as the players "abandoning" Isabelle, which further reflects her isolation and loneliness

at being separated from her husband.[43] Though Mazzoli usually employs the choir as a reflection of Isabelle's internal thoughts, when she utilizes them as a separate character, as in Scene 9, she effectively contrasts the choir's happiness with Isabelle's sadness.

Culmination of the chorus and electronics' different roles

Scene 16 "Mektoub (It is Written)" is as a culmination of all the varied roles employed by the choir and electronics, including the Eberhardt-ensemble, the pop influenced "backup choir," the instrumental use of the chorus, and musical references to earlier scenes. In Scene 16, Isabelle receives a letter from her husband, stating that he's leaving her for another woman. She sings about her feelings of abandonment and despair.

At first, Isabelle sings with only the electric guitar on p. 2, rehearsal A, m. 15. However, quickly, the electronics enter in m. 20 and are prominently featured throughout the scene until m. 89. Mazzoli notes in the score that the electronics are a combination of pre-recorded voices and organ. They recall the pop influenced "backup choir" sound first featured in Scene 8. However, unlike that scene, in which Mazzoli layers individual voices to gradually create a choral sound, in Scene 16 the electronics immediately enter as a choir, usually featuring two to four voice chords at a time. In addition, Scene 16 also begins with the electronics utilizing a granular synthetic sound, rather than progressively evolving into granulation, as in other scenes. Mazzoli first utilizes the electronic backup choir pop sound in Scene 8 to depict Isabelle falling in love with her husband. It is noteworthy that the composer employs an altered version of the backup

[43] Mazzoli interview.

ensemble sound in Scene 16 to portray the relationship's demise. The electronics' combination of voices and organ creates a unique timbre that also references Scene 8's backup choir sound.

Mazzoli also recalls earlier scenes through the main refrain that Isabelle sings in Scene 16. In m. 30-37 and again 55-63, Isabelle's melody is the same as in Scene 9 "Chanson" on p. 29, m. 166. In Scene 16, the text is altered and discusses love's end, and Mazzoli transposes the melody down a M2. Even in Scene 9, Isabelle does not immediately sing the main melody. The clarinet first introduces the motive on p. 2, then Isabelle plays the theme on the piano on p. 28, m. 149, and finally she sings it at Scene 9's conclusion on p. 29, m. 166. Thus, Isabelle's melody repetition in Scene 16 is a reference of a reference.

In m. 75, the live choir enters singing the refrain. Once again, at first, Mazzoli creates the Isabelle-ensemble, utilizing only the female choral singers. The soprano 1 and alto sing in stretto in m. 75-80. Then Mazzoli creates an even larger Isabelle ensemble by increasing the number of choral singers in m. 81-86, but still only featuring two separate melodic lines. The soprano 1 and 2 double each other, singing in stretto with the alto and Isabelle, who also perform in unison. Once again, a listener may not even notice Isabelle's entrance since she sings with the alto.

Mazzoli builds up the Isabelle ensemble until m. 87, when the long awaited male choral singers enter. In this section, Mazzoli employs the choir's instrumental role, which she previously utilized in Scene 14 to depict Isabelle's danger during the attempted assassination.

Although Mazzoli references a technique she previously employed, she still creates a unique sound. Earlier in Scene 16, the electric guitar plays a steady stream of sixteenth notes, quintuplets, or sextuplet chords in m. 62-81, building to a tremolo chord in m. 82-86. Finally when the full choir enters in m. 87, it joins the guitar's rhythmic intensity by singing sixteenth

notes with the phoneme “da.” The bass begins the rhythmical sound in m. 88, but quickly Mazzoli layers the entire choir all singing the phoneme “da” to create a stacked chord. The composer applies the concept of the Isabelle-ensemble heard throughout the opera, now expanding it to the next level as a guitar-ensemble.

In m. 90-97, the choir alternates between singing rhythmic phonemes and the scene’s titular text “It is written,” which references the letter Isabelle’s husband wrote, stating that he’s leaving her for another woman. When the choir sings the rhythmic instrumental-like phonemes in m. 90, the choir does not sing in rhythmic unison or the same text. Instead, the soprano 1 sings “da” on sixteenth notes, the soprano 2 and bass perform sixteenth note triplets with the phoneme “pa-da-la,” and the alto and tenor sing slightly syncopated sixteenth notes on the phoneme “da.” In m. 93-94, Mazzoli varies the choir’s phonemes by having the alto and tenor sing a P5 on the phrase “It is written” in sixteenth notes. Throughout this section, whenever the choir performs more instrumentally, the listener is not meant to detect each individual choral member or comprehend their words or phonemes. Rather, the listener hears a large sound of quick moving rhythms and phonemes that mimics the guitar’s rhythmic intensity, forming a guitar-ensemble.

In m. 98 through the scene’s end, Mazzoli continues the choir's guitar-ensemble-sound, but she also adds Isabelle. The protagonist sings the scene’s main refrain, albeit fragmented, repeating an earlier portion of the refrain “how quickly love evaporates” and “how quickly he [her husband] evaporates.” Mazzoli contrasts the soloist Isabelle with the rhythmic instrumental-like choir throughout this section.

In a particularly moving section in m. 112, the choir sings the titular text "It is written" in rhythmic unison. Soprano 1, soprano 2, and alto sing the electric guitar's part, while tenor and bass double the rhythmic glissandi in the double bass. Though the choir achieves its dramatic function through its clear text comprehensibility, it also mimics the instrumentalists by doubling guitar and double bass. Thus, Mazzoli uniquely makes the choir reflect Isabelle's inner turmoil while simultaneously joining the ensemble. Through Mazzoli's innovative use of the electronic backup vocal ensemble, the Isabelle ensemble in the choir, the choir versus the soloist, and the choir's instrumental setting, Scene 16 utilizes nearly all the different roles the choir and electronics that were featured throughout the opera.

Characterization of Isabelle

The Importance of C#

After discussing the chorus and electronics' roles, we can now address how Mazzoli characterizes Isabelle. She is often characterized by C# minor/Phrygian melodies. For example, in the opening Scene 1 "Overture," before the live Isabelle's first vocal line, her pre-recorded electronics feature a C# minor melody that dominates throughout the scene. Likewise, in Scene 8 "I am not Mine," the prerecorded electronic voice returns again outlining C# minor triads.

C# is an important pitch throughout the opera. For example, in Scene 9 "Chanson," on p. 27, rehearsal M, m. 119 when the opening melody returns, it is transposed up a M2 higher to C#. As mentioned previously, Isabelle breaks the separation between the instrumental ensemble and singers when she joins the pianist in m. 148, ultimately playing the piano alone. In addition to doubling her vocal melody in her right hand in m. 166, at m. 172, Isabelle also plays low loud

bass notes in the left hand that highlight the C# tonality. Her left hand enters with G#, C# minor's dominant, while she sings in C# Dorian in m. 166-177. In m. 174-177, she repeatedly sings the notes, A# (La), B (Te), C# (Do) in C# Dorian. Though Isabelle adds a bit of harmonic tension by playing a G-natural, in m. 175, ultimately her left hand establishes C# as the tonality by performing F# (Fa), A (Le), D (Ra), and C# (Do) in C# minor.

The importance of the pitch C# in the transition between Scene 9 and Scene 11 and throughout Scene 11 into Scene 12.[44] Scene 9's final note in Isabelle's left hand piano smoothly transitions to the electronic drone that begins Scene 11, "Barrel at the Breast." It is marked in the score that the drone continues throughout the entire scene, and Scene 11 is built around this C# drone. The choir begins in m. 3 singing with the C# drone in unison and grows into a cluster that emerges from the single pitch. The C# electronic drone elides the end of Scene 11 into the beginning of the next scene, Scene 12 "You are the Dust" until m. 3.

Although Isabelle's part, the choir, and the electronics utilize C# several times, it was not a conscious decision. In our interview, Mazzoli mentioned that C# is a comfortable note for the mezzo soprano's range, particularly C#5 as a climactic note that's in a mezzo soprano's mid-high register.[45] Though unintentional, the C# emphasis connects numerous scenes and harmonically unifies Isabelle's role.

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[44] The score utilized for this paper is an earlier version of *Song from the Uproar*. Though the score has a scene titled Scene 10, there is no Scene 10 in the recording. However to avoid confusion, I refer to the scene numbers as labeled in the score.

[45] Mazzoli interview.

Harmonic Tension between C# minor and A Major

Despite C# being a unifying pitch for Isabelle, there is harmonic tension between C# minor versus A Major in several scenes. Mazzoli often utilizes A Major chords in first inversion, which only differ from C# minor chords by one note. This ambiguity is first presented during the Overture in the guitar part. After the pre-recorded voice sings a C# minor triad, the guitar unexpectedly enters with a long sustained A in m. 8, suggesting that the tonal center of A major. However, only a few measures later in m. 18, the guitar returns to the opening tonality of C# minor, moving from the A down a half step to C# minor's dominant, G#. In m. 18-34, the guitar continues its harmonic ambiguity by alternating between G# and A. The piano features dramatic interjections in m. 24, 27, 30, 34, and 35, but when it plays a regularly pulsing set of eighth notes in m. 36, it also continues the harmonic vagueness. Likewise, the piano plays dyads that alternate between C# minor and A major.

When the live-Isabelle enters in m. 35, she continues the harmonic tension. At first, she sings a rhythmically altered version of the pre-recorded voice part that outlines a C# minor triad. However, she quickly continues the harmonic tension by vacillating between G# and A in m. 36-42. In the last beat of m. 41, the guitar and piano's tonal center shifts to E Major, but Isabelle still alternates between the two notes in m. 41-46. Concluding the scene in a full circle, the overture ends with the pre-recorded electronic voice resuming its opening melody and the guitar drone in m. 86 to the scene's end. As with the overture's beginning, the guitar again alternates between C# minor and A Major first inversion, leaving the harmonic tension unresolved.

Mazzoli continues the tonal uncertainty in Scene 2, although she ultimately establishes A as the harmonic center. The piano's ostinato permeating the scene features double counterpoint

in the right hand with the higher second voice oscillating between A's and G#'s. Unlike the Overture, in Scene 2, both voices in the right hand are always playing a G# and A, thus establishing A as the scene's tonal center in the beginning. Mazzoli adds a layer of harmonic ambiguity by employing both C-naturals and C#'s in the left hand in m. 2-5, creating an additional uncertainty between A Major versus minor.

However, before allowing the listener to believe the scene is in an A tonality for long, at rehearsal A, m. 6, the bass guitar and electric guitar enter with F#'s, establishing the tonality as F# minor. Though the scene's overall tonality is F# minor, Mazzoli still continues the prominence of the C# pitch and the oscillation between G# and A when Isabelle sings the scene's main motive at rehearsal B, m. 14, repeating it again in m. 21 and 39. She begins her melody singing on a C#, F# minor's dominant. M. 16-19 and 41-44 exclusively feature Isabelle alternating between G# and A. The harmonic ambiguity between A and C# that unexpectedly shifts to F# minor further supports Jonathan W. Bernard's rejection of Minimalist and Postminimalist music's stasis. Although C# is an important pitch for Isabelle and throughout the opera, Mazzoli still creates tonal uncertainty and employs surprising harmonic changes that maintain the listener's interest.

Prominent Sextuplet Rhythm and Isabelle's Circular Ending

In Scene 18, "Here Where Footprints Erase the Grave," Mazzoli creates a circular ending that references the opera's beginning while also simultaneously presenting new material. The opera's ending depicts Isabelle's death in a flash flood. Its musical and dramatic references to earlier scenes depict that Isabelle's death mirrors that of her parents with which the opera began.

Scene 17's conclusion smoothly elides with the Scene 18. In Scene 17, m. 66, the guitar quietly plays and sustains a B underneath the entire ensemble, minus the clarinet, and the singers. The guitar's B sustains through Scene 18's beginning, emerging quietly from the full ensemble's bombastic ending. The guitar's new ostinato is the motivic basis for the majority of the scene, such as the choir's main melody on p. 61, rehearsal B, m. 21.

Though Mazzoli presents new material in the guitar and choir's parts, she also references the opera's beginning through the prominent sextuplet rhythm in the piano in m. 8. This rhythm first appeared in the piano in Scene 1, "Overture." In Scene 1, Mazzoli gradually built up to a sextuplet rhythm, first beginning with a triplet in the piano in m. 24, which repeats in m. 30 and 34. Finally the piano plays the full sextuplet rhythm in m. 35. Mazzoli repeats the piano's sextuplet rhythm in m. 49, 52, 53, 56, 59, and 60.

Although Mazzoli only employs the piano's sextuplet rhythm seven times in the Overture, it so memorable that a listener recognizes its return in Scene 18. In addition to the piano's distinctive recurring rhythm, the motive's register is also noteworthy. In both Scenes 1 and 18, whenever the sextuplet rhythm occurs, Mazzoli employs the piano's extreme high register, creating a more percussive sound.

In Scene 18, the piano registers' extremities further increase with the return of the motive in m. 13. While Mazzoli continues to utilize the piano's more percussive extreme upper register, the pianist also plays in its lower register, creating a heavier more resonant sound. The piano motive is featured prominently throughout Scene 18, being repeated every two measures beginning in m. 13. Unlike Scene 1, in which the piano motive plays a high chord in the right hand, in Scene 18, the motive's texture varies from a single note, to a dyad in m. 27, to again one

pitch in m. 29. The piano motive's repetition pattern is altered, repeating four times in a row in m. 27-28 until rehearsal C, m. 29 when it returns to its original every other measure pattern. The theme stops after m. 35 and doesn't return again until p. 73, rehearsal I, m. 91. The piano rhythm again recurs every two bars in m. 91-97, building to m. 99 and 104, where it's repeated multiple times within a measure.

The sextuplet motive is so integral to Scene 18 that the majority of the instrumental ensemble performs it, unifying the scene while also creating timbral contrast. On p. 76, rehearsal K, m. 109, the electric guitar performs it. The guitar doesn't play as high as the piano, making the motive less percussive and instead blending more with the rest of the ensemble's texture. The guitar initially plays a single note in the sextuplet rhythm, but by m. 115, it performs full triads.

During the instrumental interlude in m. 119-133, Mazzoli takes a break from the prominent sextuplet motive, instead repeating the flute and clarinet ostinato from p. 73, rehearsal I. Ultimately the interlude builds to a more salient return of the sextuplet motive on p. 80, rehearsal M, m. 134 when the piano, electric guitar, and double bass all play the motive. The motive that was more part of the background texture becomes the focal point when the three instruments play it. In addition to making the Overture's distinctive sextuplet motive Scene 18's climax, Mazzoli also references the opera's beginning in m. 134 when the electronic drone enters. It recalls the Overture's electric guitar drone on p. 1, rehearsal A, m. 8.

By p. 81, rehearsal N, m. 142, previous ideas are simultaneously referenced while new material is introduced. In m. 142, a pre-recorded Isabelle emerges from the electronic drone. It recalls the prominently featured recorded voice from the Overture and Scene 8. However, now in Scene 18, the pre-recorded voice performs a new melody. It evokes the guitar's ostinato that

begins early in Scene 18 at m. 9, but is now a m2 higher. It's not featured in the score, but in the recording, after the ensemble stops playing on p. 84, m. 166, the electronic drone and the pre-recorded voice continues, gradually fading out. I believe that Isabelle's pre-recorded voice continuing after the instrumental ensemble finishes playing represents that Isabelle's writings, life, and legacy still continue after her death.

Conclusion

Through writing a quasi-opera, as Lindenberger described it, and employing anti-narrative, Mazzoli creates essentially a vastly expanded monodrama. While Isabelle is the only clearly depicted character, the choir and electronics musically and dramatically augment Isabelle's voice, creating an Isabelle-ensemble prominently featured throughout the opera. When not functioning as an Eberhart ensemble, Mazzoli innovatively utilizes the electronics and chorus to depict key plot moments, such as in Scene 4 when the electronics depicting ocean sounds and quoting previously heard melodies to musically depict Isabelle sailing to Algeria, briefly as bar patrons in "Chanson" Scene 9, or employing the choir as part of the instrumental ensemble in Scene 16 "Mektoub (It is Written.)"

It is easy for analysts to dismiss Postminimalist music's tendency to sustain specific harmonies for long periods as not creating musical drama in opera. However, this is an oversimplification. Though Mazzoli focuses on specific harmonies, she is not locked into one tonal center exclusively. As mentioned, Mazzoli purposefully employs harmonic ambiguity between C# minor versus A Major in Scenes 1 and 2. She also defies the listener's expectations when after exploring the uncertainty between the two keys, she surprisingly introduces an

entirely new harmony, usually linked by a common tone from the previous key. The opera utilizes harmonic stasis to suddenly introduce new tonalities, thus making them even more dramatic.

Similarly, though Mazzoli eschews a traditional linear narrative, she employs "standard" repertoire devices, such as reprises to link key dramatic moments. For example, in Scene 14, Mazzoli repeats Isabelle's melody and text from Scene 5 of "throw back my head" to depict the assassination attempt on Eberhardt. The choir is employed as part of the instrumental ensemble to musically demonstrate Eberhardt's danger to the audience. Likewise, the opera's circular ending references the opera's beginning through repetition, but also expanding upon, the piano's salient sextuplet rhythm and featuring Eberhardt's pre-recorded electronic voice even more prominently in the opera's ending. Both devices recall the opening Overture and showcase how Eberhart experiences a similar fate to her parents' sudden deaths.

Chapter 4 - Liza Sobel Crane's *I DID, DID I?*

Three Versions of Woman One's "recitatives" and Merging the Two Protagonists

As mentioned previously, in my opera, *I DID, DID I?*, the audience at first believes that the two protagonists interact with each other. It begins with Woman One heading out for a party. However, when she again returns later in the opera and repeats her preparations for the party, singing the same music and text, the audience realizes that the two women do not interact and that Woman One is a memory of the present day Woman Two from the night she was raped. Woman One repeats her melody and text three times throughout the opera, which will be referred to as Versions 1 through 3 respectively. Version 1 occurs on p. 3-13, Version 2 on p. 45-55, and Version 3 on p. 101-107.

Woman One's melody and text is the same in each version. It is the differences in the accompanying instrumental ensemble during Woman One's music and Woman Two's responses that drastically alter the audience's perception of the events. In Version 1, because the audience believes that the two women are conversing with each other, the tone is happy for Woman One and for Woman Two, it is sarcastic, but still amusing. During Version 2, the audience gradually realizes that something is wrong. Woman Two's "responses" are vastly different from Version 1's and seemingly unrelated to what Woman One discusses. In Version 3, Woman One sings her music alone without any "dialogue" or interruptions from Woman Two. The audience knows that Woman One will be sexually assaulted at the party for which she prepares to head out. As a result, the music is somber.

Woman One's music in Version 2 begins most similarly to Version 1 because the audience does not know initially that Version 2 is a repetition of a memory. As Version 2 progresses and

the women's relationship to each other is revealed to the audience, Woman One's music gradually becomes more disturbing. However, even in Version 2's beginning, there are subtle alterations and changes from the original that make it sound less happy, even if they are not immediately apparent to the audience. For example in each version, when Woman One enters, the flute, clarinet, and violin play a two measure descending melody, while the cello and piano perform a rising arpeggio. This pattern occurs three times in every version. Even from Woman One's initial entrance, the harmonies in Version 2 are slightly adjusted to make them sound less happy, with many of the chords changed from Major to minor or from minor to diminished. Likewise, when Woman One first sings the same melody and text in Version 1 in m. 38 versus Version 2 in m. 527, the harmony has been altered from the original Ab Major to a°.

By Version 2's m. 534, the music increases its off-kilter quality with the strings playing glissandi at the start of each measure. They create the feeling that something is slightly off as the strings play the "correct" chord and then suddenly fall off the pitch. By m. 542, the audience should be aware that something is wrong because Woman Two has said she wore the missing shirt at the housewarming party, the same party for which the audience knows Woman One is preparing to leave. M. 542 is the equivalent of Version 1's m. 55. The harmony again is altered from the original major harmonies in Version 1 to the ominously rising augmented chords in Version 2. In addition to the harmonic changes, the texture of the violin, cello, and clarinet increases the disconnect between Woman One's anticipation for the party versus what the audience perceives. In m. 542-548, they rapidly transition from playing sul tasto no vibrato to a tremolo molto sul ponticello (and ord. to flutter tongue in the clarinet.)

M. 549 is Version 2's equivalent of Version 1's m. 77. The mood becomes even more ominous as Woman One sings "It's hard to meet guys" because the audience knows (or will realize shortly) that she will sadly meet someone who will rape her. The harmonies in the strings and clarinet become more disturbing from augmented chords in m. 542 to now trichords consisting of pitch classes (024) and (026.) In addition, an off-kilter jazzy bass line is added in the piano.

M. 563 in Version 2 is the equivalent of Version 1's m. 82. At this point, it should be clear to the audience that the two women are the same person. The distressed feeling is increased further in m. 563 and does not stop until Version 2's conclusion. M. 82 in Version 1 is when the piano's jazzy quarter note followed by an eighth note rhythm is introduced and continues throughout Version 1. In Version 2's m. 563, the rhythm is maintained, but again with an off-kilter sound. In addition to altering the harmonies from Version 1's FM7 and eø7 chords to now Version 2's gø7 and D augmented harmonies, the glissandi first presented in m. 542 sound eerier. On the final eighth note of the piano's jazzy rhythm, the violin and cello glide down from their top note for an entire measure or two at a time while also playing molto sul pont. It creates the uncentered feeling of the notes almost "falling off." By Version 2's m. 575, the piano plays a low fast run without any pedal, creating an ominous mood. M. 580 is particularly significant when Woman One sings that she wants to meet new people because the audience knows she will meet someone who will rape her that night.

In addition to altering Version 2's instrumental music during Woman One's "recitatives," Woman Two's interruptions are also very different from Version 1's. They are almost completely unrelated to what Woman One sings. Likewise the mood and tempo of Woman Two's

"responses" also greatly contrast with Woman One's music. Throughout Woman Two's "replies" in Version 2, the audience hears descending lament bass in F minor. The piano first introduces it in m. 538. It returns in m. 554-562, 581-584, and m. 600-603, with more instrumentalists joining the piano.

After m. 603, the audience does not hear Woman Two's lament bass again until p. 72, m. 834. In a flashback scene, Woman One is at the fateful party talking with the mystery man (whom the audience never sees.) She asks the man's name but can't recall it, leading to Woman Two's final interruption. The lament bass returns as Woman Two dismally realizes she can't remember anything about the man, other than that he was handsome.

As mentioned previously, in Version 3 at m. 1189, Woman One sings her music as an aria without any "responses" or interruptions from Woman Two. Version 3's tempo is slower than the previous versions, creating a haunting quality for the listener. The two women are musically depicted as the same person by combining Woman One's melody with the accompaniment of Woman Two's lament bass featured in Version 2. In Version 3, the piano plays the descending bass while the clarinet performs the sixteenth notes.

In addition, Version 3 references earlier scenes. Because the audience has heard the entire opera, the listener can appreciate musical quotations from arias and duets that occurred after Versions 1 and 2 and ideally recognize their relevance in the final Version 3. For example, in m. 1208-1211, when Woman One sings "It's hard to meet guys," the flute and clarinet quote the motive from "The Men on Netflix" duet. The melody was introduced in m. 313-317, 319-324, and 330-334. In the original duet, the women commiserate how men on TV are more

appealing than men in real life, which relates to Woman One singing about the challenges of meeting men in Version 3.

In Version 3's m. 1212-1223, as Woman One sings "Yeah, I'm planning on turning some heads tonight," the flute plays the melody "Skip the small talk." The original melody is introduced on p. 41, m. 468. As Woman One sings about "turning heads," the audience knows that she'll ultimately find the party boring, filled with meaningless small talk, which is why the flute quotes the melody from the earlier scene. Similarly in m. 1225, when Woman One sings "Right now I want to focus on looking good," the clarinet plays the motive from Woman One's aria "Night Out Aria" first presented in m. 179. In the original aria, Woman One complains about how much effort women must exert to look attractive, which relates to focusing on her appearance in Version 3.

Version 3 features the biggest dichotomy between Woman One's excitement versus the audience's foreknowledge of what will happen to her when she sings in m. 1245 "This could be a very special night." The tempo slows down further, but it is the dynamics that create the biggest chasm between her anticipation and the audience's foreknowledge. Instead of Version 1's loud celebratory dynamics and jazzy rhythm, the music is especially quiet. In addition, Woman Two's lament bass returns, but performed much higher in the piccolo and piano, and played in a triple meter instead of its original simple meter sixteenth notes. The violin and cello perform eerie harmonics that function as a pedal, sustaining and gliding to and from various notes in the piccolo and piano's lament bass. The alterations from Versions 1-3 combined with the audience's gained knowledge is what makes Version 3 so haunting.

Other sections that unite the two women

In addition to the combination of Woman One's melody with Woman Two's descent lament bass in Version 3, there are other sections that unite the two women, such as the scene "I'm haunted by memories I can't remember." It is the first time that Woman Two states she was raped. Woman One's role throughout the scene varies from representing their shared blurry memories to demonstrating that they are the same person. Woman One depicts Woman Two's memories when she sings the same four questions with the same melody: "What happened to me that night?" "Who was that man?" "Where are my red sheer shirt and my necklace?" "Why can't I remember?" Woman One sings these questions four times in m. 920-929, 982-990, 1053-1066, and 1076-1084. The questions represent Woman Two's nagging doubts and uncertainties given the large gaps in her memory from being drugged.

The first time Woman One sings the questions, Woman Two listens to them without any response. However, the second time she sings them in m. 982, Woman Two answers each question mournfully with "I don't know," demonstrating how terrorized she feels by her memory gaps. In m. 1051-1066, Woman Two musically depicts that her memories are condensed into only a few looping images by repeatedly singing the word "loops." While Woman Two sings "loops," Woman One once again sings the four questions demonstrating how Woman Two is haunted by these unanswered questions. When Woman One again sings the questions alone in m. 1076, Woman Two responds with the same sorrowful "I don't know." In m. 1085-1087 the four questions culminate when the two women sing in harmonized rhythmic unison "I don't know," representing that they are the same person.

In addition to the women singing together “I don’t know” towards the scene’s conclusion, another clear example that they are the same person occurs earlier in m. 936-967. Woman Two previously sings in m. 931-934 that although she doesn't remember all of the fateful night she was raped, she clearly remembers the following day. Both women describe how they felt in harmonized rhythmic unison for the longest period in the entire opera. The prolonged rhythmic unison section usually features the women singing a phrase starting on the same pitch. While one singer maintains the original note, the other sings a major or minor second higher or lower, creating a dissonance that depicts the women’s anguish. It’s also one of the sparsest sections in the opera with the women singing nearly a cappella throughout. The instrumental ensemble only sustains the final pitch of each phrase. During this section, they state for the first time that they were drugged and raped. The sparseness allows the audience to focus on the horrifying emotions they experienced after realizing they were sexually assaulted.

The opera’s conclusion further depicts that the women are the same person. Throughout Woman One’s Version 3 aria, Woman Two silently watches as Woman One prepares and leaves for the party where both Woman Two and the audience know she will be raped. After Woman One leaves for the party, in m. 1279 through the end of the opera, the piano plays Woman Two’s lament bass, in a triple meter while Woman Two sings Woman One’s four questions for the first time. For the final question, “Why can’t I remember?,” it is the last sung moment in the entire opera. As a result, the melody ends more dramatically than in previous versions, with Woman Two singing the word “remember” on a high G#.

Moreover, Woman Two’s final sung word “remember” musically recalls earlier melodies that are layered on top of each other. In m. 1287, the flute plays Woman One’s melody “You like

Virginia Woolf too? She's one of my favorite authors." introduced in m. 794, and the violin plays Woman One's melody "This could be a very special night" first presented in Version 1 in m. 115. In m. 1291-1295, the bass clarinet and cello play a slowed down version of the "Skip the small talk" motive when the women sing "I wonder if they feel the same way," which is introduced in m. 481-483. After Woman Two finishes her final sung word and the ensemble concludes their layered musical quotations, the opera ends with the final and slowest iteration of Woman Two's lament ostinato in the piano and vibraphone. The violin, cello, and clarinet sustain notes from the lament bass. Concluding the opera with Woman Two singing Woman One's questions and layering earlier scenes' melodies demonstrates that the two women are the same person and how Woman Two is filled with uncertainty over what happened to her.

Layering of motives through multiple flashbacks

As the audience gradually learns that Woman One is Woman Two's memory from the night she was raped, they see the same events repeated with additional recollections layered on top of each other. They represent the gaps in the women's memories from the drugs. For example, after complaining about the boring small talk at parties, the women sing a duet about wishing to bypass chit-chat on p. 41, m. 468-483, labeled "skip the small talk" motive. As the audience experiences flashbacks from the same party multiple times throughout the opera, the "skip the small talk" motive returns. However, additional music is added each time as more memories are revealed from the night.

The first time the motive returns is when Woman One finally speaks with a man who wishes to discuss something more meaningful. In m. 497, the flute and violin play the "skip the

small talk" motive while Woman One sings "You want us to skip to that [interesting] part [of the conversation] now?" In m. 504-515, the violin, cello, and flute continue the "skip the small talk" motive until Woman Two muttering about her missing red shirt triggers the Version 2's beginning.

In the following repetitions of "skip the small talk" motive the audience, clearly understands that Woman One is replaying her memories of the party for Woman Two. During the third repetition in m. 792-798, the flute and violin play the "skip the small talk" motive, and in m. 796, the clarinet performs "What do you want to talk about?," which was originally heard in the second repetition in m. 498. The third layer added is Woman One singing to the unseen mystery man "You like Virginia Woolf too?" in m. 794. The fourth repetition in m. 821-831 reveals more of their conversation. The alto flute, violin, cello, and Bb clarinet play the "skip the small talk" motive while Woman One accepts and sips from a most likely drugged drink. Through the four repetitions of the party, the audience gradually learns more of what happened to the women as additional resurrected memories, both musically and dramatically, are layered.

My co-librettist, Gina Elia, felt it was important to discuss the inaccuracy of memory in general; that memory is not an encyclopedic timeline in which one can look up past events, but rather an unreliable tool, regardless of whether drugs are involved or not. Both women address this topic at various points in the opera. Woman Two sings about memory's deceptive nature in the "I'm haunted" scene in m. 997-1050. Woman One even sings an entire aria about it in m. 992-1066.

However, before the women's discussion about memory's inconsistencies, the ultimate musical layering of flashbacks that demonstrates memory's dubiousness occurs in m. 846-903.

Woman Two again asks Woman One to replay a more detailed version of what happened to her at the party, but instead, Woman One recollects seemingly random memories. The unrelated flashbacks are introduced individually in m. 846, 850, and 855. Before each memory is introduced, the glockenspiel triggers the memory with a rolled chord, which will be discussed further. Then in m. 863, all the flashbacks that were presented individually are layered on top of each other and played simultaneously. In addition, after the memory of Woman One's father singing her a lullaby in m. 855, the piano plays "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" in m. 859. The piano's lullaby creates a disturbing dichotomy between the simple and wholesome childhood song versus the women's memories, or lack thereof, from her assault.

As the flashbacks are layered, Woman One sings each memory for a second time, and then an instrument continuously plays them throughout the rest of the scene. M. 863 reintroduces the flashback of "I'm walking in the crisp cool morning," from m. 846. The flute continues playing this melody until m. 887. M. 867 reintroduces "What else do I need to do today?" from m. 851. Then the clarinet continues the motive until m. 884. M. 870 repeats "Dad tucks me in at night" from m. 855, and the cello continues playing it until m. 883.

In m. 877, finally Woman One repeats a relevant memory from the party when she sings "You like Virginia Woolf too?" from m. 794 during the third repetition of the "Skip the small talk" motive. Just as during the third repetition, once again Woman One cannot sing beyond this moment because this memory has the biggest gap. Woman One continuously stops and repeats the phrase "She's [Virginia Woolf] one of my favorite authors," like a broken record. Gradually the instruments playing the previous flashbacks join Woman One's ostinato. In addition, the non-wind instruments each speak a key word or two from the phrase "She's one of my favorite

authors." The deterioration of the layered memories as the ensemble joins Woman One's ostinato, represents Woman Two's overwhelming anguish at not remembering what happened to her beyond this point. It leads into the scene "I'm haunted" where she states that she was raped.

Musical/Memory Triggers

The start of the opera's flashbacks are represented with a musical trigger. The memory-trigger-chord is depicted with a glockenspiel and piano performing a rolled high chord and a percussive attack played by the kick drum. The memory-trigger-chord starts the flashbacks, the most important flashback being Woman One preparing for the fateful party in Versions 1 through 3. The instruments' timbres performing the rolled chords are more important than the specific harmonies. The memory-trigger-chord is first presented on p. 3, m. 35 with three rolled harmonies. As stated in the staging notes, Woman One performs three actions, one for each chord. These actions are something simple that she can easily repeat, such as adjusting her hair, fixing her makeup, etc. Woman One performs the actions every time she prepares for the party in Versions 1-3. The memory-trigger-chords occur again at the start of Version 2 in m. 524-526 and Version 3 in m. 1186-1188.

As Woman One's relationship to Woman Two is gradually revealed to the audience, the memory-trigger-chord's structural importance becomes clearer. For example, on p. 66, Woman Two addresses Woman One for the first time. Woman Two asks Woman One to show what happened at the party. M. 769 is the first time Woman One clearly recreates a memory as directed by Woman Two. In m. 769, the memory-trigger-chord returns to begin Woman One's party flashback. Similarly, when Woman Two interrupts Woman One's recollections, telling her

to show different moments from the party, the memory-trigger-chord again occurs in m. 791 and m. 821. During the musical memory layering scene on p. 73-76, which was discussed in the previous section, each time Woman One replays seemingly random memories, a memory-trigger-chord begins the start of the flashback. They occur in m. 845, 850, 854, 862, 866, 869, and 876.

Another musical trigger in connection to an event the audience sees multiple times is when Woman One adds the red sheer shirt and/or necklace to her outfit before heading out to the party. Although the clothing additions do not initially appear noteworthy to the audience, they become crucial later. Both items were missing after the party, and most likely, they were lost while Woman One was sexually assaulted.

Whenever Woman One or Two mentions missing clothing from Woman One's outfit, it is musically signaled with the percussion playing an opera gong, the violin playing artificial harmonics that glissandi from pitches C#, E to F, and the piano performing a pizz. note at the start of each violin harmonic. This trigger is labeled the "missing-clothing-trigger." It is introduced on p. 7, m. 65-67 when Woman Two sings that Woman One's "outfit is cute. Although something seems a little off about it." Although this comment seems unremarkable, it's a hint that part of Woman One's outfit is missing after being assaulted.

The first clearer missing-clothing-trigger occurs during Versions 1 through 3 of Woman One's "dialogue." Each time, Woman One sings "Hm…You know what I think would make this outfit?" In every version, she adds one or more clothing items before leaving for the party: a necklace, red sheer shirt, or both. Woman One's first missing-clothing-trigger occurs on p. 32, m. 372-376, and she adds a necklace. In Version 2, it occurs on p. 54, m. 611-617, and she adds the red sheer shirt. In both Versions 1 and 2, the missing-clothing-trigger is intentionally part of

the background texture. For example, in Version 1 in m. 372, the flute continues playing musical ideas from the previous "Men on Netflix" duet. In Version 2, the music is purposefully very disturbing as the audience realizes the missing shirt Woman Two sings about throughout Version 2 is what Woman One wore. In addition to the missing-clothing-trigger, the rest of the ensemble plays ominous music that heightens the tension. The flute, clarinet, and cello continue the descending glissando motive (glissandi played by the cello) that is featured throughout Version 2 starting in m. 563, creating a feeling that the music is almost "falling off."

The previous section discussed how musical ideas were layered to represent additional information being revealed to the audience as the same flashbacks are revisited and augmented. However, the opposite approach is employed with the triggers. Additional musical ideas layered on top of the triggers are removed to allow the audience to focus on and appreciate the full significance of the memory-trigger chord and the missing-clothing-trigger. For example, by Version 3, the audience knows the significance of Woman One adding items to her outfit. As a result in m. 1258-1261, the missing-clothing-trigger is the main focus without any other melodies from previous sections.

Similarly, the memory-trigger-chord is the only motive that the audience hears in m. 1299 to conclude the opera. After Version 3 when Woman One leaves for the party, she reenters in m. 1291. The opera's last measure features the final memory-trigger-chord with Woman One freezing on Action 1. Concluding with the memory-trigger-chord and Woman One's Action 1 musically and dramatically depicts that Woman Two will sadly replay the memory again, ending in a full circle from the opera's beginning.

Characterization of Woman Two

Similar to David Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field*, which he began by first composing Mrs. Williamson's later scene, I also first wrote "I'm haunted by memories I can't remember,"one of the later scenes of *I DID, DID I?*. Woman Two's main motive is a combination of octatonic and whole tone descending melody that begins on B, which is first presented in m. 904-911. It recurs throughout the scene in m. 931-934, 968-970, 978-979, 1069-1075, and 1088-1092.

Also similarly to Lang, Woman Two's motive from "I'm haunted" is a recurring melody for her character throughout the opera, and it is transposed to various starting pitches. For example, Woman Two's main motive is introduced early in the opera on p. 11, m. 122, and it is transposed a major second higher. During the memory layering scene, Woman Two sings a dramatically slower version of her motive transposed a minor second higher on p. 77-78, m. 886-900. She repeatedly sings this motive with the text "I can't remember" when attempting and failing to recall what happened with the mystery man. The rest of the ensemble joins in Woman One's ostinato of "She's [Virginia Woolf] one of my favorite authors." This climactic and repeated version of Woman Two's main motive smoothly transitions to "I'm haunted", where Woman Two performs her motive as the scene's main focal point.

Another melody that characterizes Woman Two is from the titular aria, "I did, did I?" on p. 58, m. 660-663. The motive consists of three eighth notes: F, Ab, and Gb, followed by a P5 leap from a low Bb to F. Often there is a rest before Woman Two sings her P5 leap, which a solo triangle fills, such as on the downbeat of m. 661. This motive recurs on p. 59, m. 684-687 and p.

65, m. 760-764. In both repetitions, the alto flute plays in rhythmic unison a third lower than Woman Two.

Although the two motives are important for Woman Two independently, she is best characterized throughout the opera with a melody that combines the descending whole tone/ octatonic scale from "I'm haunted" with the melody from the "I did, did I?" aria. Often the "I'm haunted" motive is transposed a major or minor second higher while the "I did" theme remains the same as in the original aria. Some examples of the combined Woman Two motive are p. 70-71, m. 813-817, p. 72-73, m. 836-840, and p. 99, m. 1159-1170. In all three examples, Woman Two's combined motive causes Woman One to replay past memories or comments on Woman One's unsuccessful attempts to recall them.

For example, in m. 813 Woman Two sings her combined motive as she once again unsuccessfully tries to remember what occurred between her and the mystery man. Similarly after Woman One ends her aria explaining memory's unreliability, on p. 99, m. 1159, Woman Two sings her combined motive to plead with Woman One to try one more time to replay the memory of the party. On p. 72, m. 836-840, Woman Two laments that she can't recall anything about the mystery man, not even what he looked like.

Conclusion

At first, *I DID, DID I?* features a seemingly straightforward narrative and dramatic structure. However, gradually the audience realizes that the narrator is unreliable and the opera employs Jann Pasler's anti-narrative structure. Though Woman Two is aware from the beginning of her memory discrepancies from being drugged, the audience only becomes aware of it during Version 2. Likewise, the audience also gradually realizes the work's anti-narrative form in Version 2. The interruptions evolve from the audience believing the two women are "interacting" to explicit interruptions when Woman Two asks Woman One to replay flashbacks. The memory-trigger-chord and missing-clothing-trigger musically signal the interruptions and the start of flashbacks. They become an integral dramatic and musical device throughout the opera.

Similarly, as the unreliable narration is revealed, the audience sees the same events repeated multiple times with new information and memories added. Additional musical ideas are layered as more of the memories are presented, such as the "skip the small talk," when the audience eventually learns Woman One talks with a mystery man, the person who most likely sexually assaulted her. Another example of musical layering is the memory flashback scene when Woman One replays seemingly unrelated recollections throughout her life that eventually the entire ensemble plays simultaneously.

5. Overall Conclusions and Similarities between the Three Operas

The less typical non-linear narrative forms employed in Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field*, Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*, and my own opera, *I DID, DID I?* further enhance the protagonists' musical and dramatic characterizations.

In Lang's *the difficulty of crossing a field*, the disjunct arrangement of moments before, after, and during Mr. Williamson's disappearance makes the actual vanishment finally featured in Interlude 3 more impactful. Prior to Mr. Williamson's disappearance, the other characters' descriptions of the event featured numerous text expressions about what they believe they heard or saw him do immediately preceding his vanishment, many of which seem purposefully random or even nonsensical. However through hearing the phrases repeated both musically and dramatically throughout the opera, the seemingly random remarks culminate during Mr. Williamson's disappearance. By waiting so late in the opera to feature the opera's crucial event, the audience can determine where the expressions align with or differ from other characters' retellings, causing the listener to form their own opinion of what happened to Mr. Williamson.

Similarly, in my opera, *I DID, DID I?* the frequent narrative interruptions featured in Versions 1 and 2 make Version 3 more impactful when Woman One sings her melody and text without Woman Two's disruptions. In particular in Version 2, Woman Two's intrusions are purposefully extremely dissimilar, both musically and dramatically, from Woman One's melody and text. Finally in Version 3, the unification of the two women is more meaningful when Woman One's melody repeats over Woman Two's previously seemingly unrelated lament bass.

With the three operas avoiding traditional linear narrative structures, it is noteworthy that they also all feature circular endings to varying degrees. In Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*, in

Scene 18 “Here Where Footprints Erase the Graves,” the piano’s distinctive rhythmic motive from the “Overture,” originally only featured seven times, becomes an integral element in the final Scene 18, repeating nearly every other measure. Likewise, Mazzoli recalls other elements from the Overture such as the guitar’s drone and Isabelle’s pre-recorded voice. All of these elements musically showcases how Isabelle’s death mirrors that of her parents, with which the opera opened.

In *I DID, DID I?*, in addition to musically and dramatically uniting the two women, Woman Two sings for the first time the four main questions that previously only Woman One sang throughout the scene “I’m Haunted.” Likewise, the opera concludes with the memory-trigger-chord as Woman One re-enters, demonstrating that Woman Two is still uncertain over what happened to her and will replay her memory again, similar to how the opera began.

Lang’s *the difficulty of crossing a field* is united by Mrs. Williamson’s motive throughout the opera, but particularly in Scenes 1 and 7. As Lang discussed in my interview with him, he first composed Mrs. Williamson’s aria for Scene 7 and later wrote the music for Scene 1 to unite her character musically. Although Scene 7 is not the final scene, it still occurs after the opera’s main climax during Mr. Williamson’s disappearance in Interlude 3 and Scene 6, the culmination of all the different seemingly random expressions employed throughout the opera. It is noteworthy that Lang employs Mrs. Williamson’s Scene 1 motive to begin the opera’s conclusion. Likewise, for the opera’s actual final scene, “Closing,” Lang employs the originally seemingly unimportant string quartet intro from Scene 4. The quartet’s solo becomes the accompaniment throughout “Closing” with the Williamson Girl singing her poem, which predicted her father’s death. Thus, by featuring her poem for the opera's conclusion, Lang ends

the work dramatically, if not exactly musically, with a circular ending before Mr. Williamson's vanishment.

The three operas' circular conclusions once again apply well to Jann Pasler's quote from Chapter One, which discussed how contemporary works question the idea that narrative must lead one event to another with a finale.[46] Instead, the three operas demonstrate how composers can end similarly to how they began and conclude with unanswered questions, thus causing listeners to form their own interpretations of the operas' events.

[46] Pasler, *Writing,* 38.

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