UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

THE WAY WE LOOK TO A SONG:
Five compositions and the envoicing of musical inheritance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in
Music

by
Celeste Alice Oram

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The dissertation of Celeste Alice Oram is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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DEDICATION

dedicated to the memory and the music of

1945–1999

EPIGRAPH

If we bring the past with us, it remains present and clarifies the present.
If we forget, we have nothing. Everything is obliterated.

Nadia Boulanger

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE WAY WE LOOK TO A SONG:
Five compositions and the envoicing of musical inheritance

by

Celeste Alice Oram

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Professor Rand Steiger, Chair

This dissertation discusses a portfolio of five recent compositions: *Onomastic Gymnastics* (2019), a three-part contrapuntal song for flexible instrumentation; *a loose affiliation of alleluias* (2019), a concerto for an instrumental improvisor, three offstage vocalists, and orchestra; *the way we look to a song* (2020), for three voices; *Pierre* (2021), an orchestral score for the dance-theater work by Bobbi Jene Smith; and *the power of moss* (2021), for voice and instrument. In all five works, the singing voice plays a central role: both in the performing musical forces, as well as in the processes by which the works were composed. My discussion of these pieces therefore reflects on the various ways in which my compositional practice navigates between historical knowledge and technique—especially that which guides and shapes my singing

voice—and creative agency. Drawing from scholarly frameworks such as Ben Spatz on technique, Carrie Noland on agency, and Diana Taylor on the "scenario" and the "repertoire", I understand this negotiation of historical knowledge to be neither limiting nor regressive, but rather precisely the means by which creative and artistic agency can be exercised.

At the same time, I discuss my critical engagement with historical materials and technique in my compositional practice, which seeks to excavate the socio-political structures within which musical practices resonate, both historically and in the present day. These reflexive efforts to trace and highlight the historical formations which shape and animate my compositional practice I liken to Edward Said's insistence on making explicit the "affiliations"—between practices, individuals, classes, and formations—which tend to be covered over, but whose excavation is a precondition for political change. All in all, I see this creative practice as contributing to a broader artistic and scholarly current of efforts to challenge the cultural and artistic hegemonies inherited from Eurological classical music, and instead build creative practices out of highly particular, provincial, and personal inflections of our musical inheritances.

INTRODUCTION

This portfolio comprises five pieces—two large-scale, three smaller-scale—composed since my advancement to doctoral candidacy in April 2019. I've elected to submit a portfolio of works (rather than a single large-scale work) because, for me, these five pieces represent repeated and varied attempts to work through particular compositional principles, practices, and approaches. I propose that this comparative representation of my compositional practice will therefore yield a more valuable reflection on how these themes have variously taken shape across these five pieces.

In this introductory section I briefly set the scene and outline three of the principal thematic continuities running through this portfolio:

1. Particularizing & provincializing
2. Historicizing
3. Technique, Practice, & the Repertoire of the Voice

Many of these themes have taken shape in my prior work, and so, where relevant, I introduce these themes in reference to earlier compositions. Subsequently in this dissertation I offer a piece-by-piece discussion of each work in the portfolio.

Particularizing & Provincializing

In all five of these pieces—and in my work generally—I have paid close attention to the personnel involved in the musical project, as well as the contexts of the project's creation and presentation. I then seek to instrumentalize and dramatize those particular contexts in performance. For me, this is an important way of drawing attention to the specific, personal, and local conditions which shape every kind of musical performance and production. In a sense, I understand these cultural/institutional networks and historical conditions to be the instrument I am

composing for; they shape how sound resonates. My recent compositions represent my efforts to mobilize this understanding as an artistically energizing force, rather than confounding or demoralizing. In this way they are, I hope, of a mind with Linda Hutcheon's argument that "relativity and provisionality are not causes for despair" but in fact "the very conditions of historical knowledge" and historical meaning (64).

This attention to particularity, then, is a way to resist universalising language about music, or homogenizing practices of music-making – and to resist taking for granted particular performance conditions as normative or superior. All these are strategies which many Eurological music practices leveraged historically and in the present day to gain power and supremacy for their practitioners. I adopt the term 'Eurological' from composer-scholar George Lewis, on account of its framing of social and cultural practices as "historically emergent rather than ethnically essential" or geographically bounded (93).

A primary object of my attention during the creation of a new piece is the musicians involved in performing it: the genealogies of knowledge and entrainments shaping their musicianship and musical choices, their very personal relationships to their instrument, their habits of practice, the economic equations of their professional careers, and how their musical activity is shaped by factors like gender, race, and class. In each piece I hope to offer performers an opportunity to engage consciously with these factors – and ideally even individuate and expand their own performance practice by synthesizing and applying their techniques and tools in new ways. This stands in contradistinction to many prevailing Eurological musical practices, whose trading currency is in fact the fungibility of musical labour, and the standardization of musical practices. By contrast, however, I argue the more one insists on the value of highly particularized practice, the more power is ceded to the margins.

For example, my piece for the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, *work & The Work* (2018), responded to the commission's brief of a Karl-Marx-themed piece

not by deploying the means of contemporary music to invoke ideas 'about Marx', but by deploying the means of Marxism to examine ideas about structures of value and labour in contemporary music. The musicians' performance in concert was accompanied by an electronic audio track compiled from interviews I conducted with each of them, in which they narrate their own personal philosophies for reconciling the irreconcilable: that is, the question of how to place economic value on musical labour and production. A more recent piece, *Yunge Eylands Varpcast Netwerkið* (2022), is a live radio play made with Ensemble Adapter, exploring the equivocating relationships between 'official' formations of national identity (namely, in Iceland and New Zealand) and personal, lived experience. Compositionally, that piece wove together archival radio material, mock-radio-interview footage with each of the ensemble's musicians, and quasi-autobiographical musical vignettes in which each musician appeared 'in character as themselves'.

I see this particularizing emphasis in my work to be in dialogue with a broad coalition of scholars and creative musicians working to critically dismantle the cultural supremacy of Eurological musical practices. For instance, I see my approach as aligned with what composer-scholar Sandeep Bhagwati—drawing from postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty—describes as "provincializing" Eurological traditions and epistemologies, rather than treating them as normative. For Bhagwati, provincializing "means to look at everything that you think is central and dominant – and rethink it as one of many possibilities." This does not mean, he goes on to say, "abolishing or despising your own tradition – just coming to the insight that it is but one of many traditions, and that what we think of as the norm... is in truth only the product of particular contexts. A change in these contexts might require us to change our opinion."

Similarly, Edward Said's distinction between 'filiation' versus 'affiliation' stakes out the political urgency of drawing attention to latent formations and reinscriptions of cultural authority. Filiation, Said defines, belongs to the realm of nature: it describes

the simple and unavoidable fact of being born into a certain community, be it a family unit or a nation-state. Affiliation, on the other hand, belongs to the realm of culture and society: it describes the cultural relationships one consciously builds for oneself, as well as the manner in which cultural authority is constructed and reproduced. The need to articulate affiliative networks is important, Said argues, because "we tend to forget" them (336); as Moustafa Bayoumi (58) elaborates, modern authority "often rationalizes and naturalizes its own affiliations away" by disguising its orthodoxies with "a seemingly filiative relationship, or one that appears entirely natural or self-evident." Illustrating affiliative networks and how they are formed therefore serves to "make explicit all kinds of connections [...] that have to be made explicit and even dramatic in order for political change to take place" (Said 336).

I also see the particularizing emphasis in my work to be in dialogue with a growing initiative in scholarly and creative practices to articulate one's 'positionality' as an agent and actor in formations of knowledge and culture. Dylan Robinson invokes the importance of this awareness in musical terms, for one's positionality "guides the way you listen" – and so, in turn, the way you make music, compose music, think and talk about music, and confer value to music (13). Robinson's critical focus especially is on the ways in which Eurological cultural hegemonies in settler-colonial nations shape musical perception "by generating normative narratocracies of experience, feeling, and the sensible" (13). The effort to denaturalize one's habits of listening and perception, then, might reveal the ways in which musical listening can rehearse and reinscribe the "hungry", acquisitive epistemologies which sustain colonial occupation. In coining the term "listening positionality", Robinson points towards an extremely fine-grained, personal definition of self that affords "increased potential to acknowledge one's particular relationships, responsibilities, and complicity in the continued occupation of Indigenous territories" (39). This within-arm's-reach perspective yields a different kind of awareness than self-identifying with a more generic term like 'settler'—or

'immigrant', or 'white', or 'classical musician'—a "cohesive and essentialist form of subjectivity that does not take into account subtle gradations of relationship, history, and experience" (39). In a similar way, I understand that the finer the grain of attention given to relationships between history, individual, and practice, the more politically efficacious the reflective exercise: for it reveals one's own particular "responsibilities and complicities" in the webs of cultural power in which one participates.

One defining factor in the positioning of my work as a composer is its affiliations with the institutions which support, present it, and thereby confer artistic value upon it. Indeed, I understand composition to be in essence a product of distributed labour: its production involves not only the nominal composer/s and performing musicians, but also whatever institutional, financial, and architectural structures enable the creation of the work in the first place. These structures are not merely peripheral to the work, nor a 'nice-to-have', but in fact are its *sine qua non* – something which became palpably apparent during Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions, when the suspension of institutional activity left many musicians literally unable to exercise their musicianship.

To paint with a very broad and crude brushstroke: the academic environment at UCSD which has supported my work for the past seven years bears strong affiliations with the aesthetic tenets of modernism, and their imperative to secure viable musical futures while at the same time tracing a lineage of progressive continuity from past to future. While I am not launching a critique at the institutional culture of UCSD per se, I do feel my recent work has taken shape in critical contradistinction to the various vague inheritances of modernism which swirl around the Eurological academy in general. Diana Taylor argues that the avant-garde's "emphasis on originality, ephemerality, and newness hides multiple rich and long traditions of performance practice" (9). By collapsing and erasing longstanding, provincial particularities of performance practice, the avant-garde's "self-conscious obsession with the new... forgot or ignored what was already there", shaping a discipline that is "ahistorical if not

antihistorical" (10). An awareness of the erasures made by modernism's rapacious pursuit of newness has, I think, influenced my increasingly habitual practice of seeking artistic invigoration by looking backwards to what is "already there", rather than engineering amnesiatic novelty.

Historicizing

A defining and operative feature of many works in this portfolio—as well as my previous compositions—is their adoption of recognizably historical music, musical materials, musical forms, and musical behaviors. For me, this historical engagement serves to foreground the cultures of musical production, listening, and transmission around particular musical practices: not only the cultures which are understood to have shaped the creation of that music historically, but also—crucially—the living traditions which insufflate that historical repertoire in the present day. In this sense, my engagement with historical musical materials contributes to the project of particularizing and provincializing musical practice, as the creative attention I give to musical materials runs in tandem with the critical attention I give to the social and political structures in which they resonate.

I first began working with extant historical music in pieces like *toccata & bruise* (2015) and *Sanz cuer / Amis, dolens / Dame, par vous* (2016). Both combined fairly verbatim iterations of their historical musical sources (Sweelinck and Machaut respectively) with fixed video material projected in the performance space. I think of these pieces as creative 're-stagings' of historical performance texts – almost akin to the Regietheater tradition of zanily staging a canonical text in such a way that produces its own contemporary criticism of the text. I also relate these pieces to the medieval and renaissance practice of intabulation, whereby music originally composed for certain musical forces (e.g. singing voices) would be transcribed and arranged for different forces (e.g. a lute or keyboard). The intabulator was therefore tasked with

mediating between the defining musical features of the original material, and the musical idioms of the new instrumental forces. For instance, how do you recreate on the lute the dramatic effect of a vocal phrase rising to the heights of a singer's range? Intabulation is thus an exercise in translation, codifying how musical ideas and objects variously take shape in different bodies, and according to different idioms and practices. In a sense, *toccata & bruise* intabulates Sweelinck's *Fantasie Contraria* in G Dorian, translating its contrapuntal architecture into a visual choreography representing the sensations of 'touch' a pianist exercises to orchestrate individual contrapuntal voices. *Sanz cuer*, made with Rachel Beetz & Jennifer Bewerse, intabluates a three-voice Machaut ballade for two instrumentalists, with the third phantom voice 'scored' for the performers' video-doppelgangers – who play out canonic cycles of both musical and quotidian actions. The body is thus in essence presented as a cache for cultural knowledge – a canvas onto which is inscribed the habitual gestures of both musical practice and daily life.

Later pieces in this vein of 'historical re-stagings' examine more explicitly the political stakes of musical practice. *Televisionmann* (2016), an early collaboration with violinist Keir GoGwilt, has Keir playing an 18th-century Telemann suite in duet with his video-self, who appears in various politically charged sites around San Diego (e.g. the deck of the USS Midway, the Border Field State Park). *The Young People's Guide to the Orchestra* (2017), composed for the New Zealand National Youth Orchestra, conspicuously references Benjamin Britten's similarly-titled paean to the orchestra as a utopic model for an orderly and co-operative postwar society – and pits this against the more decentralized, chaotic postwar modernity promised by radio broadcasting. Both pieces therefore weigh the political efficacy (and inefficacy) of musical practice. Keir's roving musical interventions are hilariously absurd and ineffectual, thus enacting the tension between a musician's wholly private practice and their political entanglements as a public citizen. The 'young people' of the NZNYO, on the other

hand, explicitly narrate—through their interviews broadcast to onstage radios—the ways in which they understand orchestral performance to rehearse systems of socio-political agency and power.

The pieces in this portfolio continue to engage with historical musical practice as a way to not only animate the historical and social contexts around music-making, but also to animate musical possibilities as well. While the aforementioned works each reference a specific historical musical text—and present that text in a wholly recognizable form—the works in this portfolio tend to either reference only fragments of a recognizable musical text, and/or metabolize historical musical codes and behaviors into newly-composed music which nonetheless projects a certain anachronism.

What attracts me to this pervasive vibe of anachronism is, quite simply, that by collapsing chronology it emphasizes the continuing impact of the past on the present. Many of Linda Hutcheon's observations on the parodic aesthetics of postmodernism resonate with what draws me to working with conspicuously historical materials. For one, Hutcheon argues that the postmodern tendency towards reference and pastiche "contests our humanist assumptions about artistic originality and uniqueness, and our capitalist notions of ownership and property" (89). In working with historical materials, I come to understand how my own creativity and imagination is not self-contained but rather distributed, and constantly in dialogue with the creative agency of both the living and the dead. For this reason I appreciate composer Mark Dyer's assertion that the act of engaging with historical musics is "collaborative", for "musical material has its own lived past of usage, habit, and encounters that shape it" (86). This brings with it a certain responsibility to the material – for, despite being an ostensibly inanimate object, it is embedded with many tangled agencies. Dyer therefore implores the composer to remember that "you do not own that which you borrow... as the borrower, you are embroiled in the musical material's life". Consequently, the composer is locked

in a kind of reciprocal bargain with their "borrowed" materials, and themselves "become the borrowing". By crafting, working, and transforming the material, a composer adds their own "memories, motivations, and dreams"; in return, they are beholden to be themselves changed by the transformations they have wrought (86).

In a recent article co-authored with my longtime collaborator Keir GoGwilt, we floated a proposal towards a "citational creative practice" (20). With this term, we hoped to articulate a mode and an ethos of musical creation which consciously and legibly foregrounds the sphere of influence that shapes it, rather than locating artistic value or excellence in the ability to completely metabolize—and thereby erase—that influence. Certainly, many models of artistic 'genius' or excellence are formed according to the seeming spontaneity, or innate fluency, of a musician's utterances: that they are 'a natural', or, in Said's terms, that they have an entirely "filiative" connection to their musical means. By contrast, the conspicuous historical references in my works therefore serve as quasi-'citations', reminding its listeners of the cultural frames which give the materials I work with their efficacy.

One problem that my engagement with historical materials repeatedly requires me to address is the risk that, by critically taking on 'big ticket' historical narratives of Eurological music, one in fact reifies their significance. In other words, returning to Said's terminology, one's critical assertions have the potential to both reinscribe imaginary filations at the same time as troubling them. Linda Hutcheon too diagnoses the peculiar paradox that postmodern critique harbors both suspicion of—and yet also desire for—"master narratives" (61). I felt this tension especially in the *Tautitotito/He Pūtōrino Mākutu* project (2018-19), which centered around Mozart & Schikaneder's Vienna, and the already iconic and overdetermined opera *Die Zauberflöte*. In a similar way, my engagement with sacred polyphony in *a loose affiliation* in some sense advertises and re-inscribes the continuing influence of those historical practices and repertoires. However, Lawrence Levine has critiqued the idealized, unbroken narrative

of Western classical music as a social fiction constructed—out of what are in actual fact fragmentary and heterogeneous sources—to bolster the prestige and supremacy of European civilization. Certainly, the 12th-century hymn and the 17th-century motet which define *a loose affiliation's* musical landscape are more different than alike, and eliding them into the same historical critique risks covering over their provincial particularities – as well as how much about this historical repertoire remains in fact mysterious and unknown. Moreover, many audiences are already familiar with the totalizing popular historical narratives of Western classical music, and so they bring these narrative frames to their interpretive engagement with a work.

The best way I have found to counterbalance such historical reification is to redouble my focus on my own personal affinities to the repertoires and practices I engage with. This means reflecting on my own experiences of musical listening, education, and performance, and really trying to grapple with what pleasure, or fascination, or understanding, or otherwise I derive from historical repertoires. This also means not only allowing for but in fact emphasizing the inevitable ***mis***hearings and ***mis***understandings that garble historical authority, but energize one's personal connections to musical practices. I hope that, in doing so, the spotlight of critical engagement falls not on a historical text per se, but rather on the shared inheritances which musicians habitually negotiate in rehearsal, performance, and discourse. This also raises, I think, the stakes and agency of musicians' work; setting the resolution of historical analysis at the level of the individual reveals how the essentially reproductive art of music rests on the agency of musicians to reproduce and transform the technical and material means of its affective power.

Lastly, the works in this portfolio test out the hypothesis that by populating new musical scenarios with old musical materials, it might be possible to actually change how we listen to historical music. Edward Said proposes that illuminating the networks of affiliation that "enables a text to maintain itself as a text" can also illuminate the

"social densities" which have been "stripped" from cultural artifacts by those networks' invisibility (174). Drawing from Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*, Said suggests that, for the modern reader, literary depictions of (for example) the picturesque rural mansion should not "entail only what is to be admired by way of harmony, repose, and beauty; they should also entail... what in fact has been excluded... the labour that created the mansions, the social processes of which they are the culmination, the dispossessions and theft they actually signified" (23). In a similar manner, I argue there is an imperative for a modern listener to seek to hear in historical music that which has been concealed or excluded from cultural inscriptions around music – to hear a denser overlapping of relationships than those reified by hegemonic traditions. In Walter Benjamin's terms, wherever "cultural treasures" are held up as "spoils carried along in the procession" (Benjamin 256), the analyses of historical materialism promise to uncover the memory of "those who had to carry the weight of that 'progress'" (Bohn 5).

Technique, Practice, & the Repertoire of the Voice

What all five works in this portfolio have in common is the central presence of the singing voice. This applies not only to the pieces' performing forces, but also the modes of labour and practice that went into their composition. In all these pieces, my own voice was a primary 'instrument' for composing: that is, for exploring and developing musical material. My voice was thus a primary instrument for navigating between disciplinary entrainments, historical knowledge, and my own creative agency.

I arrived at this practice of composing-with-the-voice in response to a bit of a personal crisis that my compositions were suffering because I didn't have fluency on an instrument. I'm not a crash-hot pianist, for instance, so going right back to undergrad I had always found it a frustrating experience to compose at the piano, where my lack of technical facility actively slowed and hampered my musical thinking. My many years as

a flutist also seemed to have limited applicability in my compositional practice, given the highly specific musical characteristics and technical idioms of that instrument. In one sense, I embarked on the experimental and multimedia direction of my work in recent years as a way to circumvent altogether the frustration of feeling limited in my ability to directly inhabit and enact the musical materials I was trying to work with.

But at some point it occurred to me that, as a lifelong choral singer, my voice was the closest thing I had to 'an instrument', and so I wondered how I could more actively mobilize it as a compositional tool. My experience of working with amazing improvisers—especially, in the *Tautitotito* project, folks like Judith Hamann, Keir GoGwilt, Rob Thorne, and Kyle Motl—also made me keenly aware of the rich and rewarding musical experience yielded by the investment in an idiosyncratic and exploratory relationship to an instrument. Moreover, the reflections and research of my doctoral qualifying exams—which considered the promises and pitfalls of musical collaborations between Eurologically-trained classical musicians and taonga pūoro practitioners—suggested to me that a better awareness of the dynamics of such collaborations might come from my own attentive, embodied engagement with the knowledge, techniques, and predictions that shape my own musical perception (rather than orchestrating or delegating that exercise to other people, as I had done in *Tautitotito*).

My first exercise in composing-with-the-voice was quite simple: I composed a contrapuntal descant to a Jean Ritchie song, 'The Cool of the Day'. I composed it without any reference to notation; I improvised along with a recording of myself singing the melody, and from those improvisations crafted the descant line. I found this exercise not only enjoyable and rewarding, but I also really liked the musical result. I continued to apply this singing-improvising-composing approach in all five pieces in this portfolio, as well as other recent pieces not in this portfolio (*counting steps* for two trumpets; *so many monsters I have not seen* for five flutes) – sometimes in order to

compose vocal music, but equally to compose music that would eventually be scored for instruments. In the following sections of this dissertation I elaborate on the specific application of this singing-improvising-composing practice in each piece in turn. I see this approach as relating to the compositional process of other composers (whose work I admire) who have developed a unique compositional language out of their highly personal vocal performance practices: Laurie Anderson, Pamela Z, Meredith Monk, Maja S. K. Ratkje, Jennifer Walshe, Kate Soper, Cassandra Miller, Carolyn Chen, Du Yun, Odeya Nini, Caroline Shaw, Gelsey Bell and Paul Pinto (to name but a few).

Engaging in this compositional approach also vividly illustrated to me how the various ways in which my voice has been disciplined. Most obvious to me is the influence of my training and experience in Eurological models of classical vocal pedagogy and choral music. But, equally discernible are the mimetic inflections my voice absorbs from the music I listen to. What I found to be satisfying and pleasurable to sing therefore influenced what 'made it into the music' as a 'good compositional choice'. In other words, I became curious about what historical knowledges were guiding my in-the-moment improvisational choices and instincts, and how an awareness of their influence might expand and renovate what I was able to do with that knowledge.

Performance studies scholar Ben Spatz's book *What a Body Can Do* extensively elaborates on the nature and function of 'technique' as a vector of transmitting cultural knowledge. Spatz defines technique as "sedimented" or "embodied" knowledge which structures "the way we think, move and understand ourselves" (47). "Technique" can be a fraught word for musicians, often used as shorthand for the carefully-coded signals of affiliation with elite musical practices: conservatory training in performers, for instance, or access to expensive technologies for computer-assisted composition. But Spatz's definition of "technique" usefully recuperates the term; by his definition, everyone has technique. The embodied, sedimented knowledge of technique is what

guides one's actions in any particular "moment of practice," "by offering a range of relatively reliable pathways through any given situation" (26). For Spatz, "technique" is thus present in a broad gamut of human activity: "from ballet to soccer, from martial arts to meditation, from tango to prayer" (43). Kramer & Bredekamp similarly assert the value of technique as a model for the transmission of cultural knowledge that is not "congealed in works, documents, or monuments, but liquefies into our everyday practices with objects, symbols, instruments, and machines" (24).

Second, Spatz argues that technique is "not ahistorical but transhistorical" (41). Although a given "moment of practice" is unrepeatable, the technique structuring moments of practice can be repeated from person to person, and over time (41). Distinguishing between technique and its moments of practice allows one to trace connections between individual practitioners across history and geography, and also to attend to "highly specific and localized" aspects of practice (41). There are components of my vocal technique as a choral singer in New Zealand, for instance, that I share with choral singers in England, the United States, and Mexico, which can be heard as symptoms of the church's allegiances with colonial invasion and culture-building in settler nations. At the same time, attending to the infinite variations between those local practices enriches analyses of cultural formation, transmission, and practice.

Third, Spatz asserts that formations of technique are "interwoven with power," because technical knowledge is so often distributed along—and thereby reinforces—social hierarchies (34). This can be fairly obvious in the domain of Eurological classical music, for instance if a singer's technique signals their training within an institutionally-sanctioned tradition, such as bel canto opera or church music. At the same time, Spatz is careful to note that "technical knowledge cannot be reduced to power relations," nor can any given technique be "exclusively classified as either oppressive or liberatory" (35). Drawing from Foucault, Spatz suggests that "the same technique can be deployed under different circumstances to radically different effect"

(34). For example, even if aspects of my singing technique have been formed in relation to historical repertoires of sacred music, Spatz leaves open the possibility that I do not necessarily reinforce the cultural dominance of the Church every time I sing. Spatz thus advocates that a studied awareness of one's own technique might allow for "ethical practices of the self rather than simple reinscriptions of power" (34). Carrie Noland similarly echoes the promise of individual agency to revise and inflect acquired routines; indeed, she argues that learned techniques of the body are precisely "the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to the test" (2).

These scholarly frameworks have been helpful for me to navigate and appreciate that the technical knowledge which guides my vocal practice is not a 'bad thing' per se, in the sense of being necessarily restrictive or limiting. Indeed, what I admire most about some of my favourite singers is the ways in which they skilfully combine, adapt, and transform recognizable codes of vocal entrainment: that is to say, much as Noland argues, that shared cultural repertoires of embodied techniques are precisely what allow for a singer's musical expressivity. In this way I also appreciate Diana Taylor's discussion of the dependence of various performance practices on "the repertoire": the repository of cultural knowledge which "both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning" (20). Indeed, as Taylor argues, the repertoire "requires presence", requires its participants to 'be there' as part of the transmission and transformation. I see this portfolio of compositions as an effort to be present, and to engage with the historical repertoires of technique and knowledge that I inherit, as a means to transform them.

* * *

In the following sections, I offer a condensed narration of my compositional process for each of the five works in this portfolio in turn. I focus chiefly on:

1. the principles, reasonings, and experimental curiosities which guided my compositional choices;
2. the actual composition process – that is to say, the forms of labour, and modes of practice, involved in making the pieces.

In doing so, I hope to foreground my understanding of composition as an exercise in choice-making, which then invites inquiry into the knowledge informing those choices. Rather than a mode of analysis which plots out a composition's formal and material properties as if self-contained, I am more interested in excavating the historical connections shaping those forms and materials. This approach therefore also understands composing as a mode of reproduction: a practice which reproduces ways of hearing, thinking about, rationalizing, and employing musical sound. At the same time, however, I hope to demonstrate how that reproduction can be inflected by, in Noland's terms, "variation, innovation and resistance" (1).

One avenue of discussion which has become a casualty to the interests of concision is the dead ends, the cast-offs, the red herrings, and the failures of each process. In writing about each piece I have looked back over the notebooks and sketches that documented my work-in-progress from day to day, and have been amused to be reminded of how contradictory my thinking often was; how many patently bad ideas I had; or how many times I wrote a note to myself that "this piece absolutely has to be like THIS", when in the end it turned out nothing of the sort. I put this caveat up front to remind the reader that the exercise of writing cogent prose about a creative process is inherently deceitful. In my personal experience, the way a piece turns out in the end is always something of a bewildering surprise, with little in common with what I had in mind at the start.

CHAPTER 1: *Onomastic Gymnastics* (2019)

Onomastic Gymnastics is a contrapuntal song for flexible instrumentation. The song's text I composed in the form of a 13-line rondeau: a musical-poetic form with a specific repetition and rhyme scheme, the height of whose popularity was late-medieval France. This rondeau is interpolated with a twice-appearing hymn tune, whose musical character is deliberately disjunct from the rondeau proper.

The song is designed to be re-arrangeable for various combinations of instruments and voices, as suits the performing personnel. The cantus line is in essence the tune, and should always be sung by a vocalist. The superius and tenor lines are accompanying counterpoints that could be sung, or played instrumentally (or both, with instruments doubling voices); however, these two accompanying lines need not *both* be present – one is enough. A larger ensemble might therefore designate different combinations of instruments and counterpoints to distinguish between different stanzas. The hymn-tune can be performed as three- or four-part homophony, or as a unison melody plus a descant, or as a unison melody plus accompaniment on a harmonic instrument (e.g. keyboard or guitar). I also hope to one day hear the piece accompanied by some jaunty improvised percussion.

This flexibility of instrumentation relates to contemporary performance practices of medieval music, whose scores seldom designate parts to specific instruments; rather, modern performers devise creative arrangements, assigning the written parts to available and fitting instruments, and improvising new parts or accompaniments ad libitum. In my mind, however, early music isn't the only practice informing the instrumental flexibility of *Onomastic Gymnastics*; the invitation to performers to creatively re-arrange a piece to suit the unique characteristics of their forces is also not dissimilar from covering a song, or reading a lead sheet. It is also a common remit in many repertoires of the postwar avant-garde: especially scores

created for ensembles of improvisors—such as those by Anthony Braxton or George Lewis—and composed music whose open instrumentation enacts an egalitarian politics, such as Terry Riley's *In C* (1964), Julius Eastman's *Stay on It* (1973), and Louis Andriessen's *Workers Union* (1975).

In the recording that accompanies this portfolio, the song is performed by three unaccompanied singers (Alex Taylor, Barbara Byers, and myself). The premiere performance was in fact given by two instrumental musicians: a trumpeter (Miki Sasaki) and french horn player (Nicolee Kuester). In this scenario, the rondeau verses were not sung at all, but played instrumentally, alternating between different combinations of the contrapuntal lines. The text of each stanza was recited interstitially. The hymn became an audience sing-a-long, coerced by Nicolee: a versatile and charismatic performer who could be trusted with this task. The piece is dedicated to Nicolee for this reason.

1.1 Breckenridge & Barney Ford

My work on this piece began with reflecting on the circumstances of its premiere performance. Steven Schick had invited me to compose a short chamber piece for the 'Tiny Porch' series at the Breckenridge Music Festival in Colorado, in summer 2019. These concerts would, as the name suggests, be informal free events held outdoors on the porches of historic sites in Breckenridge; audience members were encouraged to BYO deck chair. Straight off the bat, I considered how the piece might work with the grain of this nostalgic small-town setting, and respond to the modes of musical attention in a porch concert that differ from, say, those in a concert hall. In particular, the porch concert setting seemed to yearn towards a participatory musical experience – and in more ways than slapping one's thigh along with the music. Indeed, a porch concert is characterized less by *what* music is played than by the *gathering* of its audience in the first place. An awareness of who is there, how and why they got there, the relationships between themselves and with the place—and, by extension,

who is *not* there, and why not—are all defining factors. I therefore hoped to devise a musical scenario which, played out in this setting, might illuminate some of these relationships.

What also interested me was the particular porch this piece would be performed on: that of the Barney Ford Museum, the former house—built in 1882—of Barney Lancelot Ford, a prominent Colorado businessman born in Virginia into enslavement. Local historian Rick Hague would make an appearance at the porch concert, telling the audience the history of Barney Ford, and of Breckenridge - especially 'how Breckenridge got its name'.

The biography of Barney L. Ford—as told to me on the phone by Rick Hague and later fact-checked—is worth paraphrasing here, because the lyrics of *Onomastic Gymnastics* refer to parts of this history. Barney was born in 1822, the son of an enslaved woman of African descent and a white plantation owner. In his 20s Barney escaped enslavement and traveled via the Underground Railroad to Chicago, where he met and married Julia Lyoni. Barney took on a new surname as a free citizen, and the choice of 'Lancelot Ford' was Julia's—so the story goes—inspired by the name of a locomotive. I haven't found any references to a 'Lancelot Ford' locomotive, and so one wonders how much of this detail is embellishment. Indeed, librarian Robin Pope notes that many popular local histories of Barney Ford seem to draw from a putative 1963 biography which is in fact more like historical fiction. It is certainly striking that someone who had escaped chattel slavery would, in choosing a free name, adopt the name of a(nother) chattel, an(other) engine of industrial capitalism. Such a knot in the texture of a story can be a reminder of the teller's presence, and of their efforts to shore up parts of the story with explanations reflecting their own ways of sense-making. One wonders, for instance, the extent to which the commercial imperatives around printing a popular (embellished) biography morphed one man's life into a mythic fable of American social and economic transformation. It also gives one

pause to reflect on what apparent plausibilities one routinely absorbs from historical narratives, and perhaps oneself reproduces in retelling them.

Continuing on with the story... In the early 1850s Barney and Julia set out to follow the gold rush westwards to California, which meant traveling from New York by sea, so as to avoid being kidnapped and re-enslaved within the United States. But for reasons unclear the couple only made it as far as Nicaragua, where they opened a hotel serving the many Americans making the same westward journey. Eventually winding up in Colorado, Ford's attempts at gold prospecting were repeatedly frustrated, as agents of the law refused to enforce the land claims of an African-American – an illustration of Cheryl Harris's argument that whiteness and property have been mutually dependent concepts from the United States' founding (1993, 1721). Seeking prosperity by other means, Ford opened several successful businesses including hotels, restaurants, and barbershops. Though the fortunes of his businesses rose and fell over the decades, all in all Ford amassed considerable social and political capital, and became a prominent advocate for civil rights. He co-founded a school for African-Americans, and was an influential voice in opposing Colorado's statehood until after the 15th Amendment was passed, thus securing the right of African-American men to vote in the new state.

'How Breckenridge got its name' was a less compelling story, involving dry details like lost mules, a strategically-placed post office, and the alternately-spelled Vice President Breckinridge. That story is not necessary to recount here, except to note that its very dullness is a reminder of how colonial occupation spreads stealthily by the "oh-not-againness" of unremarkable means (Taylor 54). But the common thread through both these histories—of Barney Ford and of Breckenridge—was their onomastic gymnastics. Acts of naming & renaming serve as sleights-of-hand, or feats of ontological dexterity, which consolidate personal, legal, and social identities and erase names or identities prior. In this way, the stories' onomastics trace routes through the

labyrinthine relationalities constituting racialized and colonial capitalism. For example, Ford's biography might be usefully framed in terms of Tuck & Yang's "settler-native-slave" triad: escaping enslavement, Ford's self-determination is supported by the westward expansion which displaces and decimates Indigenous populations – a double-bind illustrating the "incommensurability" of some abolitionist discourses with decolonization (33). Names and namesakes, too, operate to equate and equivocate their incommensurable subjects.

Coming back around to the quaint setting of the porch concert, I was conscious that this performance would take place at the home of Barney Ford, on *his* porch. I hoped the piece might therefore keep within view the fact that its performers and audience were, essentially, guests in another's home. The porch concert setting, by engaging with these histories, would lengthen their narrative arc to the present: implicitly, their public telling says "this is the story of Barney Ford, and here we are on his porch; he is why we are together here today". We the audience are part of the drama, and so our own position amidst this history and its continuing resonances would need to be reckoned with. In this way, the dramas of colonization and capitalism are staged amidst the domestic politics of hospitality and guesthood. Perhaps, then, the musical experience of that stage might encourage what Dylan Robinson terms "a practice of guest listening", whose listeners are especially attuned to their presence in a particular "sound territory" (53).

1.2 Lyrics & lyrical significance

The full text of the song is as follows:

[A] Soon each thought now teething will tether to meaning;
How crude a wound the name first shows,
[B] 'Til with a scar tentacular it close.

[a] We saw naught but bounties innominate gleaming,
All gathered where the river slows.

[A] *Soon each thought now teething will tether to meaning;*
How crude a wound the name first shows.

[hymn] Oh, may that [*],
Be it beyond or in my care,
Come to confound the name to them I did bestow;
And forgive us our proprietary airs,
That what we tally as our own not ease the weight of what we owe.

[a] What kin claims a mother for children of keening?
His westbound name his lover chose,
[b] Into its prophecy his fortune grows.

[A] *Soon each thought now teething will tether to meaning;*
How crude a wound the name first shows,
[B] *'Til with a scar tentacular it close.*

[hymn] *Oh, may that* [*],
Be it beyond or in my care,
Come to confound the name to them I did bestow;
And forgive us our proprietary airs,
That what we tally as our own not ease the weight of what we owe.

[*] = a creature or thing to whom the singer themselves has given a name (e.g. child, cat, dog, car, etc.) - each singer decides for themselves; not all singers sing the same word.

Each of the rondeau's non-repeating stanzas is a narrative vignette depicting particular motifs from the histories of Barney Ford and Breckenridge: colonial westward expansion, resource extraction, and name-giving's ambivalent assertions of kinship, ownership, and self-determination. The repeating stanza serves as an enigmatic motto tying the vignettes together: after all, if text is to be repeated, it should be a little mysterious to maintain the listener's interest each time. To my ear, the pervasive assonance of this repeating stanza makes it register as sheer sound and resonance before the text's semantic meaning creeps in. This contributes, I think, to the stanza's riddling quality, as its sonic memorability lets a listener 'chew over' the phrase in their own mind after the piece is done. The word "tentacular" is borrowed from Donna Haraway, and her proposals for "tentacular thinking" (30) capable of

accounting for the "seriously tangled affair" of material history (42). Indeed, the Barney Ford and Breckenridge stories are tangled affairs, where historical fact is enmeshed with fanciful embellishment and contemporary significance. I use Haraway's term to extend the wound metaphor, likening the complex geometry of scar tissue to the tentacular worlding embedded in the relationships between namesakes.

The hymn text, alluding as it does to the Protestant emphasis on personal, individual spiritual experience, introduces the first person into the equation. Whereas the rondeau dwells on scenes distanced from its performers and listeners by history, the hymn text negotiates the performers' and listeners' position in relation to this history. Each singer is invited to 'mad-lib' their own subject into the text—to name a thing they themselves have named—and thereby reflect on how the politics of naming play out in their own lives. The 'proprietary airs' line is somewhat ironic and humorous, given that the phrase is colloquially used as such, and so hopefully it injects a bit of light relief into an otherwise earnest moment. The phrase also spoofs the King James Lord's Prayer, "and forgive us our trespasses", as the double meaning of "trespassing"—both moral waywardness as well as the infringement of property rights—is replaced with the petition to be forgiven for the assumption of property rights in the first place.

Parallel to these thematic considerations was my musical interest in composing contrapuntally: that is, developing idiosyncratic compositional techniques for managing the interplay and relationship between quite distinctive musical lines. This piece was my second foray into this approach, which continues throughout this portfolio (and in other pieces). Leaning on and emulating stylistic behaviors of medieval and renaissance counterpoint, as I do in this piece, is for me an exercise in trying to inhabit the musical logics and thinking that shaped this historical music. I engage with this historical repertory specifically because its creators' contrapuntal thinking exercised quite different musical thinking from my own. And, if we entertain Ben Spatz's definition that

technique is knowledge in practice, then engaging in that practice might tug at the threads of knowledge embedded in its necessary technique. At the same time, the purpose of this exercise is to adapt this knowledge to my own musical tastes, so I am continually looking for ways to renovate and reconfigure the techniques I am emulating.

1.3 Compositional process

Incidentally, most of the music for this piece was in fact composed on a porch: the porch of an Airbnb in Big Bear where I was vacationing. I hadn't finished writing the text when I started writing the music, but I had written enough to know the syllable and rhyme scheme. Composing was mostly a very slow and painstaking process of improvising melodies on the text, trying to find a melodic shape that was eminently singable but also quirky. The decision to use modal rhythm throughout was a fairly arbitrary one, emulating the rhythmic behavior of medieval chanson. Once I had figured out the cantus line, I recorded myself singing it. Then, sitting on the swinging bench in the hot, dry, pine-spiked Bernardino mountain air, I would play it back to myself and resume the slow and steady process of improvising to find a counterpoint to it. In doing so, I found myself aware of the theoretical principles of contrapuntal writing (e.g. contrary motion makes lines sound more independent), but didn't feel bound to them. Once I had recorded all the parts, I transcribed them – and finally finished the lyrics. That the whole composition process was done aurally had, I think, a substantial impact on my compositional choices. For example, musical behaviors that might have leapt out at me on the page 'thanks' to the disciplining of undergraduate music theory—like a parallel dissonance, or a leap to a dissonance—I didn't actually notice unless it really sounded jarring. Consequently, the contrapuntal behavior in this piece is defined by many unorthodox voice-crossings and handlings of dissonance, which I find in fact lucid and satisfying.

The hymn tune, by contrast, was composed back in San Diego at the piano, with the melody developing always in reference to its harmonic progression. The melody deliberately conglomerates existing Protestant hymn tunes. The final four notes are the final notes of Hans Leo Hassler's tune for 'O Sacred Head Sore Wounded'; the 3-#4-5 movement on "proprietary airs" and flattened seventh of "not ease the weight" are repurposed from John Ireland's 'Love Unknown'; "to them I did bestow" adopts the pentatonic movement characteristic of the Sacred Harp repertory – plus many more general characteristics besides. The purpose of this amalgam is not pastiche per se, though I do intend for the hymn to plainly register as a hymn. Rather, as a lifelong hymn singer myself, I'm intrigued by the psychosomatic sensations that hymn tunes engender in the singer. The way the melody moves through the vocal range, for instance, tempers their singers' energetic state – a feeling compounded when experienced congregationally. To 'hit the high notes' requires a decision from the singer to commit to them – and so whatever sound comes out is a kind of barometric reading of the singer's current state of spiritual soundness versus doubt. Coming back down to the low notes then engineers and enacts a hushed vocal supplication. The homophony of Protestant hymns is significant too, as harmonic shifts build feedback loops between the lyrics' ideas & images and the music's embodied affect. Articulated in terms of Spatz's definition of 'technique' and 'practice', the practice of hymn-singing in a sense rehearses these somatic experiences. As the hymn repertory is disseminated across time and space, it reproduces these sensations in different bodies.

All that said, I don't expect every performer or listener of this piece to have a rich personal experience with hymn-singing, and indeed am mindful that some listeners will have an ambivalent or negative relationship with the genre. But, for me, given the text's first-person emphasis, adopting a hymnodic style was a way to leverage not only that practice's clearly participatory register, but also its musical enactments of personal experience and accountability amidst a social congregation. Moreover, I think

it's interesting to explore how those affective musical encodings translate across the sacred/secular threshold, given the longstanding practice of hymnodists refitting popular secular songs with religious lyrics ('O Sacred Head' is one such example).

The relationship between the rondeau and the hymn is admittedly disjunct—smoothed over only by a pivot note and tertian harmonic shift—and this disjuncture is largely what makes this piece come off overall, I think, as quite odd. Yet, as a formal compositional principle, I am interested in the surprising arrangement of unlike elements. mostly because I think it makes a piece less like a 'piece' and more like a "scenario". If a 'piece' behaves like a "musical work" in the Eurological sense defined by Lydia Goehr—its own organic unity reflecting its composer's lucid subjecthood—the "scenario", in Diana Taylor's definition, compels an audience to "recognize the uneasy fits and areas of tension" between the many distributed subjectivities which constitute a performance, including the audience's own (55).

1.4 The Rondeau form

Why turn to the arcane medieval rondeau form in this piece at all, given that its association with European feudal aristocracy is at some remove from the histories being invoked at the porch concert, and the musical programming of the Breckenridge Music Festival? At a stretch, one might remark that medieval chansons arose from a culture of musical peripateticism and cultural exchange, having historically been performed chiefly by itinerant musicians, minstrels, and jongleurs. Re-enacting the genre therefore underscores and acknowledges the dynamics of out-of-towners descending on a small mountain resort town to put on a music festival. But this connection came to me only after the fact. Rather, there were two main reasons for trying my hand at a rondeau: the candid one being that I wanted to write my own text so I could explore ideas directly relevant to the storytelling at the porch concert. However, I've always been intimidated by the task of writing verse/poetry, and my

previous attempts have been pretty dire. The strict formalism of the rondeau felt like a way to write verse with training wheels on: it imposes both productive constraints and welcome concision.

The second reason speaks to a dynamic which to some degree is always present in a composer's work, which is the often arbitrary marriage of the needs and nature of a particular project, and the current artistic interests a composer wants to pursue. I have a continuing interest in exploring how musical form can manage dramatic impact, a listener's experience, and shifting ascriptions of meaning to musical material. Drawing on historical forms interests me because, one supposes, they must have caught on for a reason – and I enjoy the imaginative exercise of trying to excavate and inhabit the appeal of these arcane forms for their historical creators and listeners. The medieval formes fixes in particular I wanted to explore more closely.

Musicologist Elizabeth Randall Upton has analyzed the formes fixes from a ludological standpoint, considering the "play of memory and expectation" in which these forms engage the listener (106). She critiques the failure of much musical analysis to give strophic songs their due as "rich listening experiences", where music "is not 'just' repeated" but *"re*made each time as new words are sung to the repeated music" (128). A repetition-based form—like the medieval virelai, ballade, and rondeau—architects a gameplay in which the listener's "memory produces expectations, expectations allow predictions, predictions are confirmed (or not)" (106). Randall Upton posits that the satisfaction derived from this game-like experience accounts for the forms' historical popularity.

In particular, the different kinds of formes fixes offer qualitatively different experiences through this memory playspace. The rondeau, for instance (ABaAabAB), does not repeat entire strophes, and so a listener's expectations "are purposefully thwarted or frustrated, requiring the listener to restructure the experience mentally" midway through the song (114). Randall Upton notes that the rondeau poet's challenge

is to make the repeating lines make sense at the beginning, the middle, *and* the end. A rondeau therefore necessitates text whose ambiguity the listener can reinterpret with each repetition: a riddling poetic tone is both a requirement and raison-d'être of the form. She also points to the temporal "bidirectionality" wrought by a rondeau, as its repeated lines, to the listener, "sound like a circular return to the beginning of the poem while at the same time continuing forward in a straight line of meaning to its end" (118).

Randall Upton particularly discusses the significance of the B material in a rondeau, describing it as a special "reward" for the listener that happens only occasionally, but that "stands out" and "crystallizes and illuminates the meaning of the work" (126). There is also a musical necessity for the B material to be especially distinctive, because so much time elapses between the first and second time we hear it – so, to properly be registered *as* a recapitulation the second time around, it must be quite striking in the first place. I tried to engineer this 'specialness' via the song's only moment of fauxbourdon—or parallel-moving homorhythm—on "tentacular" and "prophecy", anticipated by the longest-held note in any one voice (superius), and the swoopiest, most luxuriant glissandi.

All these factors earn the rondeau its reputation as the thorniest of all the formes fixes. I considered how the form's built-in "bidirectionality" and complexity might work productively with the entangled and incommensurable colonial histories being invoked at the porch concert. In a rondeau, we hear a familiar tune carrying unfamiliar information; we hear familiar words carrying freshly unfamiliar meaning; by recapitulating the past we also continue into the future. These circular epistemic moves call to mind the narrative mechanisms Diana Taylor identifies at work in the performance scenario of colonial pasts especially, whose compulsive "once-againness" predisposes certain outcomes and yet at the same time allows for reversal and change (31). Perhaps, for instance, the subtle shifts of meanings through a rondeau's repeated

refrain might rehearse its listeners in the practice of 'mentally restructuring' other familiar and oft-repeated narrative litanies. In general, I find it interesting and important, from a compositional standpoint, to consider how purposeful, surprising, and boldly drawn musical forms can animate their themes and their subjects most effectively.

1.5 An ethics of esotericism

One aspect of this piece I continue to puzzle over is its discursive efficacy in relation to what might be termed an ethics of esotericism. Historically, the rondeau is characterized both musically and poetically by highly cultivated affectation – it is the art of the Princess atop the Pea, designed to reward the erudition of the cognoscenti. Indeed, this characteristic arises not merely for its own sake, but is hard-wired into the form: the rigid rhyme scheme necessitates both conspicuously poetic vocabularies (to maximize available rhyming words) and unusual, archaic syntax (so the rhyming words land in the right place). Given Randall Upton's assertion that the rondeau favours the highly attentive and "experienced" listener, perhaps it is ironically out of place at an informal porch concert for allcomers. The question that remains unanswered for me is what advantage there is to engaging with highly-charged narrative subjects in such an obtuse register. One point of comparison would be to the many folk songs carrying euphemisms of violence and suffering whose real meaning can be lost on the listener and even the performer – though the reasons for this concealment can range from, for instance, incendiary Scots songs covertly railing against English occupation, to the deliberate racial violence of American minstrel songs.

As with many of my pieces which are hard-wired with the circumstances of their original performance, the question also arises as to what value, relevance, or appropriateness there would be in a repeat performance of this song far from Barney Ford's home and Breckenridge, Colorado. While Barney Ford is of course a remarkable

historical figure, there is a certain presumptuousness in recounting a biographical narrative if one has scant personal connection to it. However, many parts of the song's text I would argue do have broader relevance, especially those which consider the role of names and naming in the expansion of empire and capital. If the song is to be performed again, I think the 'ab' stanza (the three lines explicitly about Barney Ford) should be rewritten – to reflect instead on a particular case of 'onomastic gymnastics' relevant to the place the song is being performed, or the people who are performing it. (I might do this rewrite, or the performers themselves might, or it might be some collaboration between us.) In this way, the creative arrangement necessitated by the song's open instrumentation also extends to the subject of the song. The song could then serve as an invitation for its performers to engage not only creative agency in its musical aspects, but also engage their political agency – by reflecting on their own relationality to their environment and their audience. I hope this might resonate productively with a rising awareness in settler societies more broadly of the contested onomastics of the places we live and move in: for instance, increasing reference to Indigenous names and histories of colonially-occupied territories.

CHAPTER 2: *a loose affiliation of alleluias* (2019)

a loose affiliation of alleluias is a concerto for improvising violinist, three offstage voices, and orchestra, premiered by the La Jolla Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Steven Schick, in December 2019. The largely improvised solo violin part was created and performed by my longtime collaborator Keir GoGwilt, who on the same concert program also performed Robert Schumann's violin concerto.

There were five main avenues of interest guiding my compositional choices in this piece, which I discuss in more detail after synopsizing here:

1. Given the apparatus of the violin concerto, I wanted to explore the gamut of dramaturgical dynamics between violin soloist and orchestra – especially those in dialogue with the genre's Romantic precedent (an example of which would immediately follow on this program).
2. Expanding from this, I wanted to build a musical form out of dramaturgical relationships between musical forces and material generally – for instance, by developing distinctive characters for each instrument and material source, and by considering the narrative impact of musical recapitulation and transformation.
3. Reflecting on my previous orchestral pieces, I was dissatisfied with aspects of my compositional and orchestrational craft, and wanted to improve on them. In particular, I lamented that I hadn't written great wind parts – my compositional thinking had been preoccupied with the strings, i.e. by collective texture rather than individual lines.
4. Inspired by the music of composer Cassandra Miller, I wanted to work creatively with existing musical materials, as an excavative and analytical exercise. In doing so I also hoped to 'take stock' of my musical affiliations: to consciously engage with the historical knowledge guiding my hand.

5. Continuing my approach from *Onomastic Gymnastics*—composing via the layering of contrapuntal voices—I wanted to put this process to work in a large-scale form (i.e. the many 'voices' of an orchestra, plus a longer duration).

2.1 The violinist and the orchestra

Implicit in the concerto genre is the overdetermined premise of the individual versus the mass: the soloist versus the orchestra. Any concerto, then, requires the composer to set the terms of that interaction. Those terms are well-defined in 19th-century violin concerto repertoire. Musicologist Maiko Kawabata elucidates how the violin concerto in the first half of the 19th century—that is, in the 'Age of Revolution' from 1789–1848—was understood by its performers and listeners to enact scenarios of military heroism. Violin soloists "wielded their bows like swords and commanded armies of orchestral musicians" (91). And a violinist was particularly well-poised to energize this scenario: against all odds, their tiny wooden box and spindly bow held their own against the gigantic forces of the orchestra. A violin soloist thus came off as an even more heroic individual than, say, their piano-playing counterparts (96). Though the revolutionary fad ultimately waned, heroic play-acting remains encoded in the bravura violin techniques that outlive the militaristic concertos in which they debuted; the champion swordsman still peeks out from behind an impressive display of spiccato or string-crossing.

Yet Kawabata also notes that the trope of violinist-as-military-hero was set within "a larger semiotic network regulating the meanings attached to virtuoso violin performance", which included equally well-defined codes of diabolism, vocality, exoticism, and gender (91). It is these other codes which tend to energize the violin concertos of the late-19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, these later concertos continue to reproduce the archetype of the soloist as a "remarkable individual" asserting themselves against the mass of the orchestra (96). For instance, the athletic

power of the military hero is channeled instead into the visceral power of cantabile tone. From the late-19th century onwards, a violinist's tone came to be heard as an index of their own inner life, or the indomitable, inimitable essence of their soul (GoGwilt 72). A violin soloist's transformation of visible physical effort into a tone which soars over the orchestra therefore enacts another victory, that of individual will.

I reference this history of the genre because I felt my piece was bound to in some way be animated by these precedents, especially when programmed alongside the Robert Schumann concerto. Indeed, by grappling with the nature of individuality itself, the concerto genre has always rehearsed quite urgent social and political ideas. As Kawabata comments, "virtuosity is power, and it is meaningful as social negotiation too" (92). It seemed impossible to eschew altogether the expectation of soloist-as-hero when so many of those codes are entrained into Keir's violin technique. But, I wanted to imagine what musical material and relationships might point to alternative formations of subjectivity – if only for a moment, to generate some distance from the particular formations of the hero-soloist in the Romantic mould. Rather than the soloist and orchestra being locked in mortal or moral struggle, I wondered what musical scenario would make them come off as quite indifferent to each other – what if they just continue on with their respective musical behaviors, with little or no perceptible mutual influence?

Around this time I heard for the first time Cassandra Miller's *Duet for Cello & Orchestra* — which does precisely that, by audacious musical means. The solo cello intractably cycles back and forth between only two pitches as the orchestra advances an equally intractable process of crescendo and accumulation. At the same time, the cellist's two pitches *are* the essential atomic structure of the whole piece; despite the cellist's radically introverted presence and minimal material, he is the music's sine-qua-non, as if the whole orchestral fantasia is in fact a figment of his imagination. (I return to a fuller discussion of this piece later.) In the end, I think Keir's presence in

the concerto is neither analogous to that of the soloist in the Miller *Duet*, nor completely indifferent as I had imagined in the previous paragraph. Nevertheless, these prompts led me to shape the soloist's musical character according to a simplicity of musical means, an almost stubborn continuance of material, and little to no common material between soloist and orchestra.

Given that a number of our previous collaborations had engaged Keir's improvisatory practice (e.g. *Televisionmann*, the Vera Wyse Munro re-enactments, *He Pūtōrino Mākutu*, *Craigie Hill*), I asked Keir if his part in this concerto too might in some capacity be improvised, and he agreed. This decision seemed appropriate not only to Keir's growing investments in improvisation as a performer, but also the direction of his scholarly research – which maps the transhistorical bodily entrainments of performing musicians, and how they both signal and transform historical knowledge and subjects. This piece then became an important nexus for Keir and I to think-through how our scholarly interests mutually engage with our creative practice. (We later co-authored an article on the concerto, published in the November 2021 issue of *Current Musicology*.)

On the one hand, an improvised violin concerto sets the stage for a display of the soloist's virtuosity and "remarkable individuality" that in many ways even surpasses its Romantic forebears. Not only is the soloist's presence and performance inimitable, but so too is the actual music they play! On the other hand, Keir and I found that tasking the soloist with improvisation in essence tasked them with an active critical negotiation between historical codes and individual practice. As Keir reflected in our co-authored article:

> What is expressively possible is determined by what remains materially present: the solo violinist still conjures the specter of the hero; the flanks of tutti violins still function with regimental force; the heavy artillery of the bass drum and timpani still bring up the rear. By experimentally working within and around these templates, we explore alternative renderings of these inescapable historical

> presences. For instance, my improvisations involve a degree of reflexive uncertainty, peppering the concerto's outsized heroic space with silences and broken-off phrases. (Oram & GoGwilt 12)

I was further encouraged by the model of Rand Steiger's improvised trumpet concerto for Peter Evans, *Template for Improvising Trumpeter and Ensemble* (2013). That piece had also been performed in 2018 by the La Jolla Symphony, conducted by Steven Schick — so, I trusted in these musicians' experience to navigate the unusual rehearsal strategy that an improvised concerto would call for. In Steiger's concerto, the trumpet part is—except a few notated phrases and prescribed rests—almost entirely devised by Evans, as is appropriate to his experience in the domains of experimental jazz and collective improvisation. By contrast, I sensed that a different improvisational prompt might better activate Keir's aptitudes as a performer. I have always admired Keir's performances of Baroque music, for their lucid management of contrapuntal voices through phrasal architecture, and their stylish ornamental invention. Keir had also recently been working on a stonking solo violin piece by Carolyn Chen—her *Study on Westhoff Partita in D minor* (2019)—which takes the templates of Westhoff's harmony and voice-leading through increasingly virtuosic variations. In an effort to build on these recent experiences, I decided the solo violin part for *a loose affiliation* should be grounded on fairly simple harmonic and contrapuntal progressions, on which Keir could freely elaborate. In this way, I think of *a loose affiliation's* solo violin part as being 'composed out of' the relationships between repertoire and invention that constitute Keir's practice.

Moreover, the ground bass form implied by this repeating progression would offer another axis along which to invert the Romantic concerto – in particular, its imperative of musical development. In the Verses, Keir's harmonic role is accompanimental as much as it is soloistic - but accompanimental in an urgent, essential sense, as if he is the Atlas of this universe, without whom it would collapse.

Indeed this tension is heightened by the improvisation – for the more Keir embellishes and individualizes his part, the more chaotic and untethered the overall musical landscape becomes. His task, then, is one of negotiating creative individuality against a certain responsibility for the collective musical coherence. By contrast, however, in the Bridge and Outro sections, Keir's part is 'scored' only with brief textual prompts, giving Keir broad improvisational latitude in those sections.

2.2 Dramaturgical form

Parallel to contemplating the dramaturgy of the soloist-orchestra relationship, I considered how analogous relationships between other instruments and materials could give form and momentum to the piece. I have an ongoing interest in the compositional application of dramaturgical principles like repetition, accumulation, simultaneity, and non-sequiturs. I have also long been interested in how Aristotelian narrative devices like peripeteia, anagnorisis, and hamartia might transform and structure musical materials. In referencing these dramaturgical concepts compositionally, I do not intend to musically represent a specific dramatic narrative or 'program'. Rather, I find the compositional application of dramaturgical frames to be useful recipes for the transformation of musical materials. For example, if a peripeteia is a drastic reversal, then enacting the *opposite* or *inverse* of musical behavior and material might shed new light on the operative workings of the original. (By way of an example, Sofia Gubaidulina's *In Croce* (1979) executes a remarkable peripeteia as the solo cello crosses the bridge of the instrument.)

Early on in the process of composing this concerto I knew I wanted there to be some kind of peripeteia: a sudden and singular moment at which the prevailing logics guiding the treatment of musical material up to that point are reversed, and so the musical material takes on a radically different guise. Needless to say, this peripeteia happens at the massive textural and stylistic shift at the beginning of the Outro (pg. 29).

From here on out, the downwardly-transposing harmonic progression inverts the spectacular rising trajectory of imitative entries in the preceding Et Terra section. It is—not literally, but in a sense—a methodical reverse-execution of the contrapuntal technologies which made this climax so spectacular.

Another formal template at work in this Outro section in the dissolution into entropy – a formal device I had explored in earlier pieces after the model of György Ligeti's music, for instance his Cello Concerto (1966), Chamber Concerto (1970), and of course, most starkly, *Poème Symphonique* (1962). In this instance in *a loose affiliation*, I find it interesting how important the downward-transposing harmonic cycle is to the sense of entropy; as the pitch gets lower, it gets harder to hear harmonic relationships, so the harmonic momentum weakens. At the same time, the strings' increasing divisions into messy timbral textures obscure this harmonic progression and contribute to the overall sense of chaos. It was important to me that this highly transparent process of deconstruction went on a little too long, and perhaps even got a little boring. The Romantic symphony's well-rehearsed trope of sublime annihilation (which this section undoubtedly re-enacts) is therefore undercut by the bureaucratic thoroughness to work through every half-step transposition until reaching (almost!) the bottom of the orchestral range.

This pivotal moment is nestled within the greater formal design of a pop song: Intro - Verse - Chorus - Interlude - Verse - Chorus - Interlude - Bridge - Chorus - Outro - Fade. I settled on this overall formal plan later in the process, once it was clear to me that I wanted to employ near-repetitions of musical material, as well as alternations of material, in order to build dramaturgical relationships between them. To encourage a listener to track these relationships and transformations—and perhaps even hazard a poetic interpretation of them—I wanted to arrange the piece according to a clearly legible form.

At this juncture I offer some brief comments on what interests me about musical repetition, given that it appears with clear formal significance in every piece in this portfolio. I use the term "structural repetition" to distinguish the recapitulation of musical sections as being, I think, qualitatively different in its effects to the "local" musical repetition of smaller phrases, like looping, or ostinati – or indeed the kinds of recursive, mutating repetition which emblemizes the music of Morton Feldman. For Feldman, such local repetition was a technique for "formalizing a disorientation of memory" (127). By contrast, I use structural repetition as a means to *orient* the memory: to stake out trigpoints, as it were, that allow a listener to mentally map the events of a piece. Elizabeth Margulis has observed that repetition makes music knowable "outside of time." This knowledge then allows the listener to "'look' at a passage as a whole, even while it's progressing moment by moment" (7). As a result, Margulis argues, repetition establishes "perceived syntactic structures", and heightens the sense that the material *means* something (14). I am attracted to musical recapitulation precisely for these quasi-syntactical properties, and the way they introduce the possibility of meaning to a musical experience. After all, even Arnold Schoenberg conceded that "intelligibility in music seems to be impossible without repetition" (1967, 5). By invoking the possibility of music's 'meaning', however, I do not echo the Romantic sense of music parlaying a subject's ineffable inner psychological state. Rather, my investment in 'meaning' per se is related to my efforts to remain aware of music's material histories: that is, how or what meaning is created and coded at all (or not) by musical means.

In *a loose affiliation*, I particularly wanted to engage a listener's memory and expectation around repetition and difference – something implicit in a pop song's repeating choruses and half-repeating verses (i.e. same music, different lyrics). In this concerto, every time material (e.g. a Verse or Chorus) is repeated, something is different – and I wanted to invite a listener to unriddle the significance of that difference. For example, each verse is in a different key (E minor vs. A minor) – and so,

although the solo violin progression is functionally the same, the voice-leading is inverted, and it sits on different strings as well as combinations of open/closed strings – all of which palpably alters the colour of the passage, and how Keir works improvisationally with the material. The choruses are likewise in different keys – so that the Angels, in the second chorus, sing in a register so much lower than the first that it drastically shifts the character of their crooning. Moreover, in the second verse the woodwind material is repeated but assigned to different instruments so that, for instance, the spiky hockets which first appeared in the highest quartet re-appear in the lowest quartet as a bizarre subterranean disturbance. In sum, I hoped these subtle yet impactful shifts in musical character—underscored by their formal placement—would piece by piece build up the dramaturgical world of the concerto.

The pop song structure also connects some dots with the concerto's smattering of Paul Simon references, on which more later. In practice, however, because of the recurring harmonic progression in the solo violin, the Bridge is much more similar to the Verses than the bridge of a pop song tends to be. Perhaps in fact the dramaturgy of the concerto reads more like a fairytale triptych, where the third attempt at a magical task is the one that succeeds and thereby transforms the world. What's more, it's arguable whether a 16-minute 'pop song' really still functions like a pop song. But these inconsistencies don't particularly bother me; I still found it generative to work with the formal concept of the pop song form behind the scenes.

2.3 Orchestration

As previously mentioned, I had hoped to develop my own orchestrational technique by establishing for each section of the orchestra a musical function different from the roles and hierarchies I had assigned to them in previous pieces. Because of my interest in vocal counterpoint, I cast the wind section as the core 'voices' of the orchestra. Interestingly, because this piece would be performed by the same orchestral

forces as the Schumann concerto, I was working with a reduced wind section: double woodwinds, and only two trumpets and two horns in the brass. To maximize a sense of soloistic heterogeneity across these smaller forces, I used auxiliary winds throughout; instead of a double woodwind section (designed to blend and homogenize) there are eight timbrally distinct soloists: piccolo, alto flute, oboe, cor anglais, Eb clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, and contrabassoon. Together with the brass, this gave me a 12-voice 'choir' with an expanded timbral palette and pitch range. In considering how to manage 12-voice counterpoint, I took a leaf out of the Venetian renaissance practice of *cori spezzati*, where an extravagance of polyphonic voices were managed by dividing them into multiple spatialized choirs, and activating antiphonal relationships between them. I therefore divided the 12 wind voices into three distinct quartets, organized according more to range than traditional orchestrational categories:

- high quartet: piccolo, Eb clarinet, oboe, trumpet 1 con sord.
- mid-range quartet: alto flute, cor anglais, bassoon, horn 1 con sord.
- low quartet: trumpet 2 senza sord., horn 2 senza sord., bass clarinet, contrabassoon

As the wind material developed compositionally, these three quartets came to symbolize for me the antiphonal relationships between historical materials. In my mind, the operative metaphor governing the quartet's musical behavior is one of ghost choirs: each has sung in this space at some time, but centuries apart – and now their echoes intermingle. However, the thorny density of musical simultaneity that resulted from this operative metaphor was one of the most difficult things to manage compositionally – and, I think, remains one of the greatest inhibitors to making the piece 'land' successfully for a listener.

The strings, rather than driving the bus texturally and harmonically (as they usually do in orchestral repertoire), take on a more responsive role. I imagined the

string section as a resonant architecture, whose reverberative sensitivity would be cranked up over the course of the piece. In this sense, the string section performs a function more typically assigned to an orchestral percussion section. I was also interested in handling the sheer personnel numbers of the string section as a messy congregation, rather than the crisply disciplined phalanx of the symphony orchestra. As a result, there are often stray solos within each string section, and the string writing tends towards indeterminate or 'en masse' gestures and textures. Moreover, the first we hear from the corporate strings is them 'shushing', which emphasizes the players' presence as bodies onstage. I also hoped to maximize the sonic and affective difference between the violin soloist and the string section; for instance, the first time the orchestral strings play in a manner similar to the soloist (i.e. generous legato bowing of extended melodic phrases) is at the moment when the violin solo drops out, at the 'Et Terra' chorus (pg. 23).

I have long been interested in the percussion section's capacity to introduce 'readymade' sounds into the orchestral sphere – especially sounds which point to recognizable, quotidian material action. This interest led to the 'foley' percussion of cascading beans and splashing water. (I am grateful to percussionist Sean Dowgray for advising me that beans would cascade much more successfully than rice or sand.) I enjoy setting these utilitarian sonic objects against the more symbolic register of musical sound which undergirds the orchestral repertoire. At the same time, however, the juxtaposition of the percussion foley with other sonic and theatrical actions does in fact nudge these sounds into a symbolic register: for they beg the question as to the significance of this quotidian action. In the first intermezzo, the beanfall sets off the Angels' coughing, which is alleviated by Keir drinking the glass of water; in the second intermezzo, the Angels' screaming is doused by the splashing water as Keir tips the empty glass over. I enjoy the theatrical absurdity of such cause-and-effect relationships between physically unconnected bodies.

My interest in devising dramaturgical relationships between musical sources also prompted me to leverage the spatial dimension of live performance. Following on from the last paragraph, I enjoy the tension between, on the one hand, the thoroughly utilitarian nature of backstage space (where the 'magic' of performance is absent—people are actors not characters—and where you are NOT supposed to make any noise), and, on the other, the thoroughly metaphysical space encoded in the topos of the Fernorchester (e.g. the offstage horns of the apocalypse in Mahler's Symphony no. 2). In other words, backstage sound can be either an irksome intrusion, or a portentous visitation: and the distinction is in the nature of the sound. (Would we hear a distant jackhammer as a herald from a heavenly realm?) For this reason the Angels' vocal behavior vacillates between whispering and shushing—the sounds of unruly teenagers waiting in the wings—and their luxuriantly beautiful singing, which almost spoofs the trope of disembodied celestial voices. There was also a practical reason for deciding on the vocalists' offstage position: I was excited to use this piece as an excuse to sing together with my much-admired UCSD colleagues—composer/vocalists Barbara Byers and Lauren Jones—but I am prone to performance anxiety and tend to sing worse onstage.

The offstage violin at the end is yet another attempt to complicate the dramaturgical role of the concerto soloist. In the Romantic tradition, the theatrical prowess of the soloist depends on their singularity: their heroism plays out not through mano-a-mano combat with another individual, but against the mass of orchestral forces. Introducing another solo violin into the equation therefore erodes the subjectivity of the main soloist: it hits at a doppelgänger, or at the impermanence of such heroism. However, instead of a straight-up stunt double, it struck me as more interesting for the offstage violinist to play remarkably different material to Keir. In contrast to Keir's plangent harmonic counterpoints in the verses, the offstage violinist plays solid pillars of disjunct triads (the lowest pitches maps the melodic contour of

diatonic Gregorian 'alleluias' onto the compressed pitch space of the chromatic scale). I am grateful to LJSO violinist David Bracher for performing this solo so beautifully, well aware that such an assignment was far above and beyond his usual duties.

In sum, this piece took its shape around a dramaturgical—perhaps even quasi-architectural—organization of forces and material. Not only does this architecture define, I think, a listener's experience of the piece, but my compositional decisions too were largely influenced by the 'stage' that had been set. Questions about the character or arrangement of musical materials were, for the most part, answered by considering what would best reveal and animate this governing architecture (as with the discussion above of what the offstage violin would play). I think of it a bit like sci-fi world-building.

2.4 Composing music out of music (Cassandra Miller's *Duet for Cello & Orchestra*)

Here I briefly diverge into a discussion of the music of Cassandra Miller, in recognition of its substantial influence on my compositional thinking in this concerto – especially her *Duet for Cello & Orchestra* (2015), composed for Charles Curtis as soloist. What I love about Miller's music generally is her process of transcribing and transforming existing musical sources (usually particular recordings, rather than scores or 'a piece' per se). Over and above the alluring musical material it generates, the process of engaging so meticulously with the inner cogs of existing music brings into focus the mutual constructions of music and subjective experience. As composer James Weeks describes, hers is a process which examines "the way we make these objects our own, about how we love things and thereby change both ourselves and them" (53). Miller explains in conversation with Weeks:

> I suppose I'm curious about things that move me, and the process in my brain of then identifying personally with these things, as if my very personhood is built out of the things that have touched me in my life... usually there's something about that fact of identification that I don't understand, something in there that doesn't sit right, or that piques my

> curiosity... The difference between this echo and its origin is interesting to me. (59)

The *Duet for Cello & Orchestra* is based on a recording of the Italian folksong 'Trallalera', performed by Sardinian singer Maria Carta. That recording is a brisk, two-minute morsel; Miller's orchestral re-rendering radiates outwards to more than 30 minutes. Every feature and figuration from 'Trallalera' is abstracted and radically recast in an unrecognizable musical guise:

- Carta's deftly ornamented melody Miller has fastidiously transcribed, and then orchestrated with strident fauxbourdon-style harmony. This reworked melody first appears in the trumpets, whom Miller directs to play "as a mariachi band"; it then gradually accumulates canonic echoes at transpositions of the 5th in, sequentially, the lower strings, upper winds, horns, and upper strings. The lightness and litheness of Carta's voice is thus transformed into a thick band of timbre, which nevertheless moves with the same hyper-detailed contour.
- The chords of the guitar accompaniment are refigured as waves or clouds of diatonic harmony; first appearing in the low brass, these chords similarly accumulate instruments and polyharmonic superimpositions as the piece goes on.
- The oom-pah bass line of the guitar accompaniment becomes the characteristically introverted I-V ostinato played by Charles Curtis, likewise refracted into other bass instruments at transpositions of the 5th.
- Even the crackle and static of the old vinyl recording finds an analogue in the patina of the tubular bell, tam-tam, and bass drum which tremolo on and off throughout the piece.

There are also many formal features in Miller's *Duet* which I find captivating, and which seemed to me a proof of concept for the kinds of dramaturgical forms I was

hoping to build. Its asymmetrical rate of accumulation makes clear the piece's trajectory, while still guarding the surprises in its execution. And, like many accumulative forms, it gives nothing away as to what will happen once we get there – in fact, the listener's suspenseful speculation grows with the accumulative arc. [SPOILER ALERT] The *Duet* arrives at a remarkable peripeteia at the crest of its fullest orchestral texture – at which point the hitherto most important aspect of the music (the melody) vanishes, and the shadowy 'upstage' harmonic forms overflow 'downstage'. For the final several minutes of the piece we are left floating, like an astronaut untethered from their spaceship, in a song without a melody. It is also significant that, in the *Duet*, Miller too was explicitly engaging with the orchestra's Romantic inheritance; her program note describes the piece as an attempt to "reconcile the extraverted, romantic character of an orchestra with Charles Curtis's introverted performance practice".

Following Miller's model, with *a loose affiliation* I wanted to explore a similar approach: to build a library of material out of a modest fund of originary sources, and then from those materials compose a crafty assemblage. And, following Miller's explanation above, those originary sources should come from music which, in the main, I really love – and thus seems significant to my own construction of musical personhood, even (especially) if that identification is a little confounding.

2.5 Counterpoint and musical inheritance

When it came to selecting a cache of foundational musical sources, my interest in medieval and renaissance counterpoint had already put on my radar a couple of pieces whose features I was particularly entranced by. One was a 12th-century two-voice hymn to St. James, *Ad superni regis*, collected in the Codex Calixtinus. Another was Giovanni Gabrieli's early 17th-century sacred symphony *Exaudi Me*

Domine. How I worked with these materials was informed by their particular musical features, as well as my understanding of their historical contexts.

First, the *Ad superni regis*, which I was drawn to for the contrapuntal interplay between its two voices. The voices spiritedly leapfrog and somersault through pitch-space, and often converge in unison, like a magical disappearing act. Christopher Gibbs suggests that polyphony such as this was devised improvisationally, with two singers exploring-aloud various discants until the most pleasing version—having been settled on and performed several times—was written down. The hymn is thus an interesting case study in how embodied technique shapes musical creation; circumscribing the singers' improvisatory 'free play' is the entrained pitch-pathways around their Guidonian hands, the acoustic responsiveness of the buildings in which they were singing (NB the 'echo effect' of the oscillating 3rds and unisons), and their Quadrivium-derived understandings of consonance & dissonance and their divine invocations which, for instance, goad the singers into unison—the most 'perfect' consonance—at the end of every phrase.

Fig. 1: *Ad superni regis*, Anonymous, 12th century, from the Codex Calixtinus

In transforming the *Ad superni* hymn, I first recorded myself singing the two original vocal lines, and then devised two additional contrapuntal lines (on my flute), turning the two-voice hymn into four-voice counterpoint. I didn't intend to pass off these new counterpoints as a successful medieval forgery; indeed, they avoid the original hymn's most striking features (e.g. the lucid sequences and tertian melodic movement). Rather, this process allowed me to, first, inhabit some of the embodied musical impulses that shape the melodic lines of the original hymn – so that, second, I could magnify and refashion my own experience of those impulses by musical means instinctive to me. In my experience, the *sensation* of singing this hymn (as opposed to its formal and stylistic features) is defined by the physiologically calming effect of a falling melodic line; of arriving at a gleaming high note by a circuitous route; of surfing phrase shapes which swell to a peak before breaking into increasingly virtuosic diminutions. It was these features that I was trying to recast with my additional counterpoints. In fact, I was always deliberately tending towards 'extra': trying to make the musical lines a little too much, a little over-florid, so as to increase the stylistic distance between the source material and the newly-composed lines.

As for the second source I worked with, Gabrieli's *Exaudi Me Domine* is a prime illustration of how, by the early 17th century, counterpoint had become a sophisticated technology engineered to magnify the Counter-Reformational splendor of the Roman Catholic Church. Lest that reading seem consigned to the past (or applicable only to gullible peasants), I would argue such musical efficacy is still alive and well; countless times I've heard fellow choristers or audience members respond to similar repertoire with, "you know, I'm not religious, but that music really gets me". *Exaudi me Domine* is an incredible phenomenological display of surround-sound holiness, as its four choirs merge in and out of each others' sound in a way that produces the illusion of more than sixteen voices. And so, while my re-working of *Ad superni* had engaged with the music's embodied vocality, it was the technical maneuvers of *Exaudi me* I wanted to

engage with. I noted the musical 'tricks' deployed by Gabrieli, especially those templates of vocal texture and voice-leading that seemed (to me) to engineer a particularly somatic experience of divinity – that is, which advertised the power of the church most persuasively.

I focussed on three musical motifs that set the concluding text: "quando coeli movendi sunt et terra" (when the heavens and the earth shall be moved):

a. The authoritative cadences of 'quando coeli', in which a proliferation of imitative rising scales and weird false relations magically coalesce into a perfect cadence;
b. The strange pictorialism of the imitative 'movendi sunt' hockets, a jarring and disruptive musical gesture;
c. The final eschatological buildup of 'et terra', in which sequences of suspensions and resolutions gradually bring together all 16 voices into a stunning cloud of colour (in, the recording I was listening to, the final bars set off an amazing chorus of upper partials).

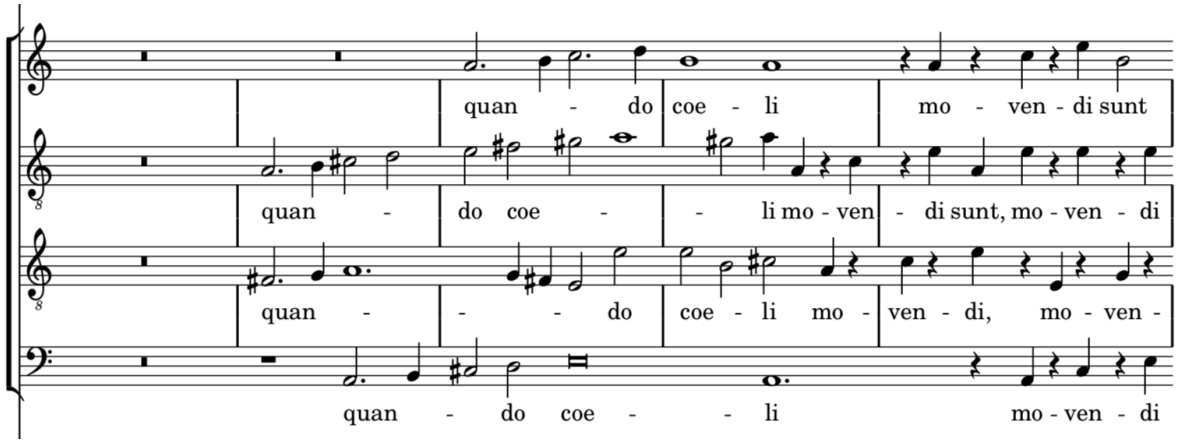

Fig. 2: the setting of 'quando coeli' and 'movendi sunt' in Gabrieli's *Exaudi me Domine*.

I worked with these contrapuntal templates to push them beyond the stylistic boundaries of their original source – in a sense exploring the outer affective limits of these technical contrapuntal maneuvers. The strong harmonic pull of the 'quando coeli' cadence, for instance, I use to steer the music into weird harmonic fields, especially by turning the rising major scale in the bass into a whole-tone scale. The 'et terra' I use to serve a similarly climactic purpose, but again, I warp its original metric and harmonic shape by diverting it into unexpected and unsettling harmonic regions, and adding off-kilter counterpoints. However, as mentioned earlier, the spectacular climax of the 'et terras' doesn't just stop there, as Gabrieli would have, leaving a listener basking in the awesome angelic echoes of the final sonority. Rather, it is immediately followed by a methodical deconstruction into entropy – pointing, I hope, to the methodical construction that likewise engineered the 'magical' climax.

In contrast to the conspicuously historical music which populates the Verses, Bridge, and the 'Et Terra', the Angels' alleluia choruses are 'free-composed' in the sense that they do not build on an extant musical text – but they nevertheless take shape out of historical knowledge and materials. I composed the alleluias via vocal improvisation, recording my singing and then singing along with myself. While improvising, I found myself following the current of jazz harmonies, turning unexpected chromatic notes into harmonic resolutions, as well as chromatically hovering around a triad at a cadence point that brings to my mind country-and-western harmonic tropes. At the same time I was led by a predilection for vocally pleasurable glissandi and stepwise melismas, tropes of vocal ease and ebullience.

In appending the "baby, don't cry" of Paul Simon's lyric to the liturgical "alleluia", I draw a connection between the function of 'filler' words and phrases as they appear in both sacred and secular music. In my mind, the 'yeah's', 'woah's, 'baby's, and 'hoo-oo-oo's of popular music are not altogether dissimilar to a liturgical 'hosanna', or 'amen': the words have semantic meaning, but when sung, they exceed their semantics

and become a phonemically pleasurable vehicle for vocal sensation and virtuosic display. My setting of the word 'alleluia' is certainly shaped by the sensory experience of singing each of its vowels—the dark spaciousness of the first 'ah' engages and warms the breath, then brightens to the more resonant 'leh', finds suspenseful and vibrational resistance in the closed and buzzy 'oo', which finally explodes into a recklessly triumphant "yah". This brings to mind Spatz's comment that technique is shaped not only by shared immaterial knowledge, but also shared material factors: "we are making use of the same techniques, the same knowledge of what is reliably possible given the similarities we find in our bodies and environments" (41).

Another characteristic of both the 12th-century hymn and Gabrieli's 17th-century polychoral motet that I wanted to actively engage with was the allegiances between their musical technologies and imperial power. *Ad superni regis* is anthologized in the Codex Calixtinus—more specifically, the Liber Sancti Jacobi (the Book of St. James)—as part of a liturgy venerating St. James, whose cult as a righteous warrior and worthy martyr boomed with the Iberian crusades. And, as previously mentioned, *Exaudi Me Domine* was composed for Venice's splendid Basilica of St. Mark, an anchor of the Papal empire. It is difficult to conjecture how these pieces might have consolidated, in musical terms, the authority of its patrons for its twelfth- and seventeenth-century listeners. I hazard only what Dylan Robinson describes as music's "agglutinating" properties: its capacity to make "meaning 'stick'" (282-3). The practice of sacred polyphony, engineered over generations to signal and invoke divinity, contributes to the aura of St. James's saintliness, and naturalizes the Pope's divine authority, thereby "forgetting" the affiliations between spiritual and political devotion. If singing this music elicits what Walter Benjamin terms "empathy with the victor," then the musical knowledge this singing produces amounts to the "spoils...carried along in the procession", which Benjamin warns the historical materialist to view with "cautious detachment. For without exception," Benjamin

writes, these “cultural treasures... have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror” (256). Much like Cassandra Miller describes her music as being written into the “difference between the echo and its origin” (Weeks 59), the project of composing *a loose affiliation* essentially became for me an exercise in handling the dissonance between the materials constituting my musical inheritance, and what they historically signified or served.

In rounding out my cache of foundational building blocks, I wanted to build some anachronism and eclecticism into the piece, and juxtapose these very old, very highfalutin musical registers with something more vernacular. I settled on the song ‘The Boy and the Bubble’ by Paul Simon and Forere Motloheloa; it too, like the contrapuntal music I was working with, was music personally satisfying to me, popularly persuasive for a great many other people – and also evidences music’s tangled imperial affiliations. Paul Simon’s iconic and controversial *Graceland* album signals to the extensive histories of white musical artists’ and markets’ reliance on non-white—and especially Black—cultural resources for their creative enrichment and economic monopoly. Graceland’s huge and sudden commercial success, Neil Lazarus argues, was “imperial in its effects” in the way it disrupted and reconfigured South African popular music via “top-down determination, more or less wholly indifferent to the response of local [Black] musicians and listeners” (204). This contemporary reference set amidst old and distant music signals, I hope, that the affiliations between music and imperial power are relegated neither to a distant past nor a patently authoritarian agenda — that, in fact, even a utopian effort of musical cross-culturation can be “imperial in its effects”. In practice, however, the import and significance of the Paul Simon references waned as the piece took shape, and as my transformations and developments of other musical materials took precedence instead. In the end, material from Simon’s song operates in the concerto only peripherally – namely, in the few words of sung lyrics, and the title.

2.6 Score revisions

The score submitted with this portfolio is a revised score, produced after the premiere performance. There are thus some differences between the score and the accompanying recording, which is from the December 2019 premiere, given by the La Jolla Symphony conducted by Steven Schick. I revised the score in anticipation of a recording session with Keir GoGwilt and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in 2021, which in the end was canceled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Nevertheless, I hope this concerto might see another performance, and these revisions thus represent my attempts to clarify some of the musical qualities that felt to me unfocussed, ill-defined, or otherwise wanting in the original version:

- The Angels' opening vocal material has been revised, largely by inflecting the underlying harmonic template with more contrapuntal detail, and giving more definition to each phrase. (The audio recording accompanying this dissertation begins with a DIY mockup of this newly-revised vocal material, before splicing to the premiere performance recording.) In the original version, the looping harmonic progression was too 'plain' and consistent, I think, in relation to the more adorned, volatile quality of the Angels' material later in the piece. In other words, it didn't make dramatic sense to me that the Angels would sing so differently at the beginning of the piece versus elsewhere. It made more sense to establish their presence and character as somewhat volatile from the outset, to signal that their sudden appearance in each chorus threatens more widespread structural disruption (as scripture, and Tony Kushner, reminds us angels do).
- The wind 'quartet' parts in the two verses have been re-metered. In the original score, each wind quartet played in a different tempo, independent from the conductor. In revising the piece, I re-transcribed this wind material in the closest metrical equivalent to the conductor's tempo, so that all wind players can 'follow' the conductor (rather than being responsible for keeping a different

tempo within their respective quartet). One benefit to this revision is that the wind material now aligns more reliably with the solo violin part in harmonically optimal places (and not left somewhat to chance). It is also better suited to a professional orchestral setting, where there is very limited rehearsal time, but musicians have more experience reading complex rhythmic notation. (The amateur environment of the La Jolla Symphony allowed for ample rehearsal time to rehearse the separate quartets as independent 'chamber groups' – something which would be impossible in a professional orchestra setting.)

- In the revised score, some subtle percussion activity has been added to the two choruses, i.e. accompanying the Angels. For one, this is an effort to enhance the acoustic resonance in these episodes – especially so the solo violin is not the only sounding agent onstage, but has some acoustic support, almost like reverb. Furthermore, I hope this addition elevates the dramaturgical presence of the percussion in the piece generally: for instance, the 'foley' percussion of the falling beans/splashing water in each Intermezzo now doesn't come suddenly out of nowhere, but emerges from the percussion's presence in the preceding Chorus.
- I re-orchestrated the Outro section to give more definition to the harmonic relationship between the Angels' transposing melodic line and the transposing string chorale. The Angels' melody is now shadowed by an extended alto flute solo, and the transposing string chorale is more fully orchestrated with wind doublings.

Lastly, I owe a debt of thanks to Matt Kline, who helped me write the double bass part by teaching me various extended bass techniques which proved effective material for the piece. Matt was also assistant rehearsal conductor for the premiere,

running woodwind sectionals. The piece could not have come together without Matt's generous assistance in both regards.

CHAPTER 3: *the way we look to a song* (2020)

This song for three unaccompanied voices was composed for the 2020 NEO Voice Festival, originally intended to be held in Los Angeles in person, but instead carried out virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The decision to make the festival virtual was made before I began composing, so from the outset I knew the piece would not be rehearsed or performed in person, but rather each singer's part would be rehearsed & recorded separately, and mixed into an audio track for online release.

3.1 Vocal heterogeneity & form

This song was written for three particular singers, Corona de los Santos, Eli Berman, & Jaquain Sloan – each stunning vocalists whose unique artistic aptitudes I wanted this piece to highlight. I had not met them in person, but we were in correspondence as the piece took shape, and they shared with me recordings of some previous performances. Corona is an operatically-trained tenor who expressed to me his particular interest in the artful delivery of poetic text. Eli's voice spans a baritone to mezzo-soprano range, and Eli requested that this piece would integrate these ranges as one 'voice', rather than compartmentalizing them as separate vocal personas. Eli is also a composer, with an established practice of improvisation and extended vocal technique that they were happy to apply in this piece. Jaquain is a bass with experience in a wide variety of vocal ensembles, from church choirs to acapella groups – the latter especially equipping Jaquain with a knack for the stylish delivery of more vernacular lyrics.

Given these performers' multifarious vocal capabilities, I knew this piece would need to not only withstand, but in fact thrive on, vocal heterogeneity. At the same time, I wanted to continue developing the contrapuntal technique and process which had generated *Onomastic Gymnastics*, and the Teen Angel passages in *a loose affiliation of*

alleluias: both classically polyphonic textures in the sense that three fairly homogeneous vocal lines form one unified vocal character. In an effort to accommodate both interests, the piece alternates between substantial solo episodes for each singer (a form well-suited to the remote-recording process), and polyphonic refrains which serve as culminatory moments. The piece thus lent itself to a pop song structure (intro - verse - chorus - verse - chorus - bridge - chorus - outro), with the verses & bridge as solo episodes, and the chorus as culminatory polyphonic refrain. *the way we look to a song* thus also extends my interest from *a loose affiliation* in leveraging the inherent drama of the pop song form. In organizing musical and lyrical material, I am prompted to consider the relationship between verses and chorus; how the chorus will provide a pithy 'solution' to the riddle of the whole song; what kind of curveball the bridge will throw; and how to manage the play of expectations that comes with the verbatim repetition of choruses vs. the partial-repetition of verses (same music, different lyrics). Moreover, what attracts me to repeating sections of music is that it foregrounds the presence and the artistry of the performer(s), by requiring them to make interpretive decisions about how repeated sections might be performed differently. Similar considerations around the dramaturgical consequences of recapitulation and variation were also at play in my exploration of the rondeau form in *Onomastic Gymnastics*. The pop song structure also seemed an apt accommodation for an online release format, and the different modes of listening operant in online streaming vs. live performance.

3.2 Lyrics & lyrical significance

The lyrics I collaged from a number of deliberately eclectic sources, some of which continue strands of thematic exploration from earlier pieces.

VERSE 1
[LUX ALBA ERAT] *(a bright light)*
I was taken up and carried upward to the mountain;
There my beloved gave himself to me.
O his eyes were marvelously unspeakable to see.
Then by great revelation I saw all the will of Love in all,
and all perfection of her perfect justice.
Transpierced by sweetest sweetness,
nothing of myself remains to me,
For the burningness of Love has opened wide the closed totality

CHORUS
and I believe these are the days of miracle and wonder.

VERSE 2
[EURUS SPIRAT] *(a dry wind)*
I came into an age of informational abundance
driving innovation rapid and unforeseen,
incentivised by accelerationary ecstasy.
Behold: value generating at a rate outpacing
seamless process flows in constant transformation.
Scaleable to present need,
nothing of myself remains to me
as the obsolete is swept away by salvationary velocity

CHORUS
and I believe these are the days of miracle and wonder.

BRIDGE
I cannot heave my heart into my mouth.

The chorus text is from the chorus of the song 'The Boy in the Bubble' by Paul Simon & Forere Motloheloa, on the 1986 album *Graceland* – the same source as some of the sung text in ***a loose affiliation of alleluias.*** As in that piece too, by repurposing iconic relics of popular culture, I seek to draw out their ambivalent meanings. A scrap of text like this is so familiar it reads as truism. Yet, precisely by virtue of its familiarity it can mean markedly different things to different people at different times. Simon's lyrical hook exemplifies such ambiguity: is it an ecstatic, mystic witness to divinity present in daily human experience? Or a catchphrase of capitalist technocracy and

American exceptionalism, by which miracles are declared to consolidate political power around their performer and beneficiary? I presume Simon is dealing deliberately in such ambivalence. I therefore think of a piece like *the way we look to a song* as being to Simon's famously catchy lyric what a liturgical trope is to a sacramental text: a newly-composed embellishment which interprets the relevance of uttering the original text in this particular time and place. I seek to tease out these hermeneutic alternatives not only by nestling the original text amidst other texts, but also applying to the original text new musical renderings that colour it with surprising new inflections.

Each of the song's two verses elucidates a different side of the chorus's ambivalence. The text of the first verse I collaged out of excerpts from the writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp, a poet and mystic living as a beguine in the 13th century. Her voice represents a sincere and unironic conviction in "miracles and wonder". The excerpts come from her Visions: prose texts narrating her ecstatic religious experiences, such as revelations of heavenly scenes and communications with divine beings. Excerpts from Hadewijch's Visions also constitute the tape-track 'libretto' of _ . . / . _ _ / . / . _ . . / . _ . . / *[dwell]*, my 2018 piece for percussion & radios. Ecstatic medieval literature continues to intrigue me for a number of reasons. First, this literature tends to confound a modern reader, as it represents intense mental and physical experiences quite foreign to contemporary rationale. (In other words, a modern reader puzzles, "what was ***really*** going on with her?") Second and similarly, this literature often functions at the limits of language, exhibiting recursive obsessions with certain words and concepts which are clearly phenomenologically exceeded by the ecstatic experience the author is trying to represent. Throughout Hadewijch's writing, the word "Love" is used with compulsive frequency, so that the experience of reading the text enacts a worshipful contemplation of the multivalent essence of "Love". Other tautologies, like "sweetest sweetness" or "perfection of her perfect justice", are given an appealingly musical flow by their repetitiousness. Moreover, the genre allowed for

women's literary & philosophical expression at a time when avenues for such were dismally few. In sum, it was precisely the anachronism of pairing Hadewijch's visions with Simon's lyric that appealed to me.

Exploring the more cynical sense of "miracles and wonder", the second verse is composed of excerpts from recent interviews with female executives in the fields of finance, technology, and pharmaceuticals. I was especially fascinated by turns of phrase whose meaning was opaque to me – in other words, the kind of 'managerial speak' popularly lampooned as evidence of the dissociation of the late-capitalist executive class from 'the 99%', or of the 'emperor's new clothes' charlatanism of venture capitalism (personified in the sensational rise and fall of Elizabeth Holmes). In this way, these phrases too seemed to work at the limits of language: their speakers grasp for neologisms and new syntactic stylings to testify to the innovation of their enterprises. And, like the phenomenological excess embedded in Hadewijch's ecstatic writings, these phrases contained, I sensed, an ecstasy over some essential, ineffable force of forward progress.

The comparison of Hadewijch's Divine Love with Abundant Capital echoes a major paradigm underscoring Marx's *Das Kapital:* that of Spirit usurped by Capital. As philosopher Kojin Karatani has observed, in *Das Kapital*, the "fetish" is in essence a redux of the Hegelian notion of "spirit" as a worlding, self-generating force seeking to realize the absolute essence of itself (169). Fetishism first attaches "something like a spirit" to material commodities (as a result of which their exchange-value exceeds their labour-value) – and ultimately develops until it realizes a "visible divinity" in capital itself (170-71). With joint-stock and share capital (the speculative trades practiced by the executives quoted in the lyrics), capital valorises its own worth independent of reproduction; the "absolute fetish" of capital thereby takes on a "divine power", a "mystification of the most flagrant form" (182). Given that I was composing this piece in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, weighing on my mind personally was how

the pandemic made plain the capital-fetish's imperative to preserve its own own value. The 'spirit' of capital overpowers the spirit of human life, as public health seemed to many governments and businesses subservient to sustaining economic growth.

The bridge is a line of Cordelia's from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, spoken to her father when pressed to testify her love and loyalty to him. A bridge section in a pop song typically has a contrasting relationship to the verses and chorus, and often somehow reframes or complexifies the point of view expressed elsewhere in the lyrics. While the first two 'voices', or characters, in this song's triptych grasp at the limits of language to express an ineffable force, the third voice represents the incapacity or refusal to engage language in this attempt. The chorus repeat which then follows the bridge, not surprisingly, is sung without words.

Jaquain's bass part in both verses is also texted, though with very few words, and in Latin. This is a deliberate nod to 13th-century French polyphonic motets, in which a short Latin 'motto' would similarly underlay the tenor line, while the other voices delivered more fulsome vernacular text. Here, the first verse text, "lux alba erat", roughly translates "there was a bright light" from the first verse of 'The Boy in the Bubble'; in the second verse, "eurus spirat" approximates the "dry wind" that "swept across the desert" in Simon's second verse. To my mind, there was an intriguing parallel between these central images in Simon's first vs. second verses, and the subjects I ventriloquised in each verse respectively: Hadewijch's spiritual enlightenment vs. the eschatologically dry winds blasting across California and through the Silicon Valley heart of share-capital. This musical-textual detail is admittedly almost imperceptible; nevertheless, it exhibits my continuing interest from *a loose affiliation* in generating new musical relationships by excavating and transcoding elements from an existing musical text. In sum, I hope the overall taciturn character of the bass part creates a mini-dramatic arc through the song for the singer performing it: from the furtive, arcane 'mottos' of the verses to Cordelia's anti-climactic confession in the bridge.

All in all, that the sources of the song's lyrics are deliberately eclectic—and might even be read as non-sequiturs—in fact appeals to me. I think of the song as a macaronic verse whose text collages different registers of sense-making and reality.

3.3 Composing by singing

Musically, I wanted to explore highly melismatic vocal writing, and extend my techniques for composing florid counterpoint which I had previously applied in *Onomastic Gymnastics* and *a loose affiliation of alleluias*. My process for composing the vocal material was therefore similar to these previous works. I improvised a lot vocally with the texts until settling on patterns, stylistic tendencies and melodic shapes that felt satisfying. I would then record myself singing one vocal part, and later improvise counterpoints against it until similarly arriving at a 'keeper'. Lastly I would transcribe what I had recorded.

Different factors would guide this process in different parts of the song. For the brief 'intro' section (reprised at the end of each chorus as a kind of interlude), I first settled on the stepwise descending bass line. I've always been intrigued by the transhistorical grooviness of this well-worn 8-7-6-5 template. It appears as a harmonic anchor in many disparate musical genres and traditions—from Baroque chaconnes to American blues to Slavic folksong—not so much by chance, or as proof of some kind of musical universalism, but by its transmission through complex networks of musical exchange across generations, geography, and social & racial milieux. Scholarly consensus agrees that the chaconne arrived in late 16thC Europe from the colonial Americas, where it underscored lively, risqué, anti-establishment dance-songs (McClary 2007, 195). It then took on a life of its own amidst the loftiest genres of European classical music, where its character morphed over a couple of centuries from bawdy ruckus into noble lament (Ross 24). At the same time, the musical characteristics which launched the chaconne in the first place continued through their originary

traditions in vernacular musics of the Americas, from Andean folk music to Afro-Latin music.

These four notes in essence leave a trail of breadcrumbs through paths of migration, colonial influence, and transculturation that, as Susan McClary describes, "bear tantalizing but frustrating witness to a distant past recorded (if at all) with gaps, misunderstandings, and distortions" (196). Largely on account of this historical ambiguity—but also by virtue of its affective ambivalence—this musical template seemed an apt accompaniment for this song's anachronistic and ambivalent lyrics. In extending the bass line past the 8-7-6-5 pitches, and composing upper voices to counterpoint it, I was attracted to meandering lines whose chromatic alterations (especially semitone resolutions) suggest mini mid-phrase cadences on surprising notes, thus signaling a restless, searching, unstable quality.

Composing the choruses, my initial improvised multi-tracks were truly sketches in the sense that the precise pitches 'didn't matter'; rather, they scaffolded a general outline of tempo, rhythmic features, pitch relationships, melodic compass, texture, phrase climaxes, and vocal underlay (i.e. how many notes per syllable in each voice). I still have a GarageBand project on my laptop with a bizarre recording where for several minutes I noodlingly sing the phrase "and I believe these are the days of miracle and wonder" over and over. (The 'winner' became Eli's part in the chorus.) Listening in retrospect, this recording serves as a useful aide-memoire of some of the vocal figurations I was consciously exploring while improvising. I had already established that this line of text would in general go floridly 'up and down' (pitch-wise) over the phrase, with the important words "these are the days" (specifically, the *most* important word, "*these*"—not any other days!) at the apex. And so my improvs try to plot out the best route to get there (and back): through quasi-sequences (the thrice-rising minor third on "I believe"; the thrice-falling fourth on "these are the days of miracle"), through the replacement of flat pitches with their natural counterparts to engineer cadential

upthrust, or being led by how the resonance of the vowel influences vocal gesture (the "ah" quality of "and I" lends itself to larger leaps, while the "ee" quality of "believe these" secures intonation on the chromatically altered notes). On the way down, "miracle"—a special word!—gets flat spellings of pitches that had been sung as naturals on the way up, introducing a 'miraculous' harmonic shift. It's important to note, though, that I was not consciously 'thinking harmonically' in this improv-composing process. Rather, this chromaticism arose as a by-product of trying to create melodic lines with enough implicit tension and release to satisfyingly sit as stand-alone monophony.

3.4 Vocal macaroni

The solo sections (verses & bridge) are unmetered, and rhythm is generally unspecified, in the interests of giving singers freedom to sculpt phrases and rhythmic momentum according to their own dramatic instincts. The notational distinction between small and large noteheads is an effort to visually differentiate this notation from modern editions of Gregorian chant – and thus suggest a different vocal delivery. Gregorian neumes are most often represented in modern notation as long strings of stemless noteheads, and prevailing performance practice assigns a relatively even vocal quality to each note and a moderate tempo to the whole passage. By contrast, in this piece, I wanted to encourage singers to explore a declamatory vocal delivery: where rhythm is shaped by a more volatile rendition of the text, and where each notated pitch is not necessarily sung with equal tone, but rather some pitches take on an ornamental quality. Small noteheads are thus more like 'throwaway' notes that the singer might swoop from, fall off to, or 'swallow' on a diphthong or voiced consonant – while the larger stemmed noteheads represent longer and timbrally fuller notes. Implicit in this instruction is an invitation for singers to employ their 'classical' vocal technique as one tool among many, alongside techniques familiar to them from other vocal styles and disciplines.

To that end: listening back to my sketchy recordings of the song-in-progress reminded me that my improv-composing method was essentially an exercise in navigating disciplinary technique, as it shapes the behavior and thereby the musical quality of the (my) voice. Indeed, it is arguably impossible to compose any kind of song *without* engaging in referential play with vocal genre and discipline – because how a singer sings (i.e. their technique) will be informed by what has been composed. In composing this piece I hoped to ambiguate vocal disciplinary boundaries, by drawing on expressive codes known to my voice from various singing practices. My purpose in doing so was to create a space in which singers would need to consciously negotiate the surfeit of technique (i.e. knowledge of "what a body can do", cf. Spatz) available to a 21st-century musician in the formation of a 'voice' for themselves. More than through luck of anatomy or sheer charisma, this "performing 'self'" I understand to be formed in the agential ways Naomi Cumming describes: by the discrimination between "habitual interpretive responses", and "the mastery of kinesthetic signs" (71/34).

To me, this compositional attempt at vocal macaroni felt most successful when techniques from different disciplines combined to serve the same expressive end: for instance, if a phrase which builds tension via melodic figurations from plainchant resolves this tension via ornamentation known to my voice from Appalachian folk music. I also gravitated towards melodic material with ambiguous stylistic provenance that would jibe with various vocal techniques. For example, the modal, highly melismatic second verse elicits from Eli an awesome synthesis of their experience in classically operatic, Appalachian folk, and Jewish cantorial singing. However, I was disinclined to put instructions in the score explicitly directing a singer to deliver certain material 'in the manner of X'. Such strictures would rely on what Nina Sun Eidsheim terms "figures of sound": an ultimately reductive hermeneutic of listening and thinking about music which privileges "the sonically knowable", and seeks to "define sound according to an original, and apply the question of fidelity to a source" (18). Far more

interesting to me than signaling specific stylistic categories was entrusting the material to other singers with their own disciplinary aptitudes and aesthetic judgment. Then, the 'figures of sound' governing vocal technique can take on infinite gradations of individuated significance, leaving open "the possibility of a body that is written upon *but that also writes*" (Foster 15).

In essence, my process of improvising/composing became a real-time, embodied exercise in charting the limits of what techniques sit tastefully and credibly within my vocal and expressive reach. There are many techniques available to a singer—there are many voices a voice can voice—but to differing degrees of familiarity, aptitude – and, by extension, credibility. Not surprisingly, sometimes the attempt to steer my vocal technique beyond its usual habits wound up sounding silly and insincere, like doing a bad impersonation. My voice therefore became an instrument of measurement: hearing my own voice coming back to me was a litmus test judging, for instance, effective stylistic synthesis vs. appropriative imitation, or an intriguing amalgam of historical codes vs. a bland knock-off. The arbiter in this test was—to use the composerly term—my 'intuition'. But rather than a mysterious black box that just 'is the way it is', together with Naomi Cumming I understand intuition to be a "learned capacity to make discriminations of sound and its signification... part of a 'play of signs' that can be shared and discussed" (55).

That said, I concede I find it difficult to articulate the many micro-decisions that guide this improvisatory process towards composed music; at a certain point I find my own analysis of this process untrustworthy, as it is prone to confusing intention with actuality. But I sense it is nevertheless a process crucially important to reflect on – for it is a principal site at which ideas about music are reproduced and transformed. No doubt, this site can be fraught. Especially where vocal performance is concerned, a pursuit of polystylism which draws on popular music practices calls to mind discourse around, for instance, "Blacksound", Michael D. Morrison's methodology accounting for

American popular music's dependency on the "intellectual performance property" of African Americans (795). Daphne A. Brooks's study of "sonic blue(s)face" similarly charts the "palimpsest of spectacular aural racial and gendered iterations" which black *and* white female singers have long rehearsed in their constructions of a performing self (49). The rich meticulousness of these and other critical scholarly analyses I think can offer composers useful tools for reflecting on, in Cumming's term, the 'play of signs' which shape and animate our work. And, if intuition is not innate but learned, then presumably it will shift with learning. In my mind, this transformative feedback loop between musical knowledge, critical reflection, and the intuition guiding musical practice is perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for the value of composing at all, for it confirms the potential for individual creative agency to produce and transform cultural knowledge.

CHAPTER 4: *Pierre* (2021)

It was a great privilege to work alongside the incredible team of artists, dancers, collaborators, musicians, staff and administrators in the creation of *Pierre*. U.S. American choreographer Bobbi Jene Smith had been commissioned by the Royal Danish Theater (hereafter abbreviated as DKT, i.e. Det Kongelige Teater) to create a one-act dance-theater piece with a new orchestral score for the combined forces of the Royal Danish Ballet, Corpus—the small contemporary dance company within DKT—and the Royal Danish Orchestra. As a long-time admirer of Bobbi's work, I was stoked that she invited me to be a collaborator for this project. At the same time, from the outset both Bobbi and I were more than a little bewildered by the task of creating a new work framed by the highly coded institutional boundaries of classical ballet, and the imperial prestige of a royal institution. For both of us, envisaging a new work meant envisaging not only the events onstage, but how they might resonate through the whole apparatus that housed them: the political hierarchies of the rehearsal studios, the opulence of the theater, the historical lifeways which continue to animate the bodies of the living.

4.1 Musical forces

Practically speaking, the first step in my process was to establish the piece's musical forces. A crucial element in Bobbi's recent work has been the onstage presence of live musicians, who carry as much dramatic heft as the dancers; in her stage works, music is almost never 'canned'. Discussions with DKT concluded that it would not be possible for the orchestra to venture beyond the pit (union rules). Nevertheless, Bobbi and I looked for ways to bring some musical activity out of the pit and onto the stage – in an effort to foreground the embodied effort and inherent drama of musical production, rather than taking the music's omnipresence for granted. When Bobbi

auditioned the dancers of the Royal Danish Ballet for the piece, she asked if any of them sang or played an instrument, and would be prepared to do so onstage. It turned out that learning a musical instrument is part of a dancer's training at the Royal Danish Ballet School, so Bobbi got a lot of positive responses. Bobbi therefore established that there would be three dancers performing solo musical roles: one violinist, one pianist, and one singer/pianist. The great value of this arrangement was being able to spend weeks of studio time with each dancer-soloist honing a highly particularized musical delivery—integrated with their choreographic roles—that emphasized both the soloists' own idiosyncrasies, and the significance of their musical activity within the overall drama. The violinist Eukene Sagues, for instance, was coached by Bobbi's longtime collaborator, violinist Keir GoGwilt. Together we worked to pair Eukene's classical violin technique with a conscious attunement to physical impulses and sensations in a manner similar to Gaga: a dance language developed by Ohad Naharin and influential in Bobbi's work, having been inherited from her long tenure with Naharin's dance company Batsheva.

The relationship between onstage vs. offstage musical activity also generated productive slippage between the music's diegetic vs. non-diegetic function. If the onstage soloists' music is firmly diegetic—it's part of the dramatic action; the musicians themselves can 'hear it'; everyone onstage can 'hear it' too—then the orchestra's presence is more ambiguous. In my mind, there are moments in the score where the orchestra is firmly diegetic—here we are, on a stage in a royal theater, listening to a symphony orchestra—and other moments where the orchestra's presence is more cinematic, metaphorically externalizing an interior emotional state. Sometimes the distinction is diaphanous: as in the very beginning, when the orchestra's tuning-up subsides to reveal the military-percussion ostinato that obstinately haunts the man on whom the curtain opens, and by extension the entire first scene.

The orchestra management had allowed for one or two orchestral musicians to be onstage, and Bobbi agreed with my suggestion that it be a solo trumpeter. I had been intrigued from the outset of the project by the Royal Danish Orchestra's institutional history: they make proud claim to being the 'oldest orchestra in the world', established in 1448 as Christian I's trumpet corps. (To this day, each musician in the orchestra has a unique number indicating the order in which they joined. Numbers 1, 2, and 3 were Hans, Walther, and Andreas—the first trumpet players in 1448—and by now they are up to the 1070s.) This origin story prompted me to consider the ways in which the orchestral tradition in general has, over the centuries, served as a paramilitary force in its advertisement both of imperial might, and the stunning spectacle of disciplined bodies. Bobbi and I were also on a Roy Andersson buzz, and especially struck by a scene from his film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014) in which Karl XII walks into a bar, on his horse, in an elaborate ritual of kingly power – and suddenly the denim-clad, jukebox-browsing patrons are in the middle of Sweden's bloody invasion of Oslo. Bobbi and I were struck by the scene's chilling anachronism: history literally barges in and recapitulates its past cruelties. It is a surreal analogy for the tenacity of historical power in shaping present experience. We imagined the solo trumpeter as an extra on the wrong set, playing the wrong tune – and if it were Hans, or Walther, or Andreas who had stumbled into the scene, they bring with them the risk that King Christian, whom they herald, might accidentally be summoned too.

4.2 Music & the body

Another foundational consideration was the relationship between music and choreography. I noted that a crucial aspect of how music functions in Bobbi's work is that the music feels familiar: either because it is—perhaps even overdetermined (like the Bach Chaconne in *With Care*, the third movement of Brahms's 3rd Symphony in *Caldera*, or the Cavatina from Beethoven's String Quartet no. 13 in *Lost Mountain*)—or

because it operates within commonly legible vocabularies of song and songfulness (like Connie Converse's folk songs in *Broken Theater*, or Asaf Avidan's blues-rock songs in *Lost Mountain*). This is important because, to my eye at least, much of the power of Bobbi's choreography comes from the highly 'musical' counterpoints it palimpsests onto its accompaniment. Familiar music, then, affords dancers and audience alike an opportunity to actively 'follow along' with the movements' undulations of resistance & surrender to the music's affective suggestions. However, it's important to note that Bobbi doesn't generally choreograph 'to the music', in the sense that each step falls on particular musical counts or events. Rather, the sensations of the dancer's body guide their movement through time. The music therefore needed to supply the dancers with a rich web of psychosomatic sensations for them to navigate and respond to choreographically.

For the above reasons, it seemed to me that a strong sense of pulse, clear trajectory of phrases, and lucid harmonic language would be important (though not necessarily omnipresent) tools in constructing a musical landscape within which Bobbi's choreographic vocabulary could parkour. In our early conversations, Bobbi had cited iconic works of the Romantic repertory, like Brahms's 3rd Symphony and Schubert's Piano Trio Op. 100. Of course we both understood this didn't mean the music should pass off as Brahms or Schubert—why have a composer write a new score if you just want Brahms? Rather, Bobbi wanted the dancers' movement to come up against the kinds of expressive musical codes in this repertoire, and for its tint of fading bourgeois grandeur to colour the dramatic world of the piece.

All that said, at the same time as consciously dealing in familiar musical codes, I wanted to make the orchestra sound persistently strange. Because orchestras are very strange indeed! Their musical practice operates within highly particular, homogenizing circumscriptions (for orchestral musicians must be interchangeable), and the genre itself can only exist at all in symbiotic relationship with particular commercial and

political interests. And, given how specialized orchestral practice is, its musicians are rich repositories of highly cultivated musical technique; their bodily instincts metabolize the sum of orchestral repertoire and bring it to bear on any new piece. There are certain musical materials that an orchestra player 'just *knows*' what to do with; I was more interested in this sensation in the body, mutually encoded in specific musical material, than in the material itself. In essence, I wanted to continue from *a loose affiliation* my experiments in how to 'compose' a piece out of the genealogies of technique embedded within musicians' bodies, in the engineering of their instruments, and in the codes their listeners learn to decipher. And the prospect of making a musical score 'out of' the bodily entrainments of its own making seemed an apt way to approach writing for dance.

4.3 The basement of the repertoire

Around this time, Bobbi was working with set designer Christian Friedlander to build the physical world of *Pierre*. As their starting point, Bobbi & Christian visited the DKT storeroom and rummaged through cast-off set pieces from previous productions. (This is where they found the giant lion, readymade.) And—though this didn't pan out in the end—there was talk of doing an open build, i.e. all setpieces would be schlepped onstage by the dancers in view of the audience during the opening scene. I was struck by the idea that I might similarly 'rummage through the storeroom' of the symphonic repertoire, searching for leftovers to reassemble. Or that I might visibly 'build' something out of the constituent 'bits' of the symphonic repertoire, treating their metaphysical maneuvers as wholly tangible and material *things,* subject—as all things are—to dismantling, renovation, and decay. As a preparatory exercise, I did a detailed analysis of Brahms's 3rd Symphony, seeking to uncover its magician's tricks, or the wizard behind the curtain. I noted the harmonic and orchestrational mechanisms

constructing the utilitarian underlay for the symphony's metaphysical characters and rhetorical shifts, and its dazzling displays of orchestral power.

At the same time as unriddling Brahms I also turned my attention to what I lovingly term 'B-grade symphonies': the un-famous ones, written by un-famous people, overlooked and uninfluential. What attracts me to this 'un-repertoire' (for it is hardly in common circulation) is how it often makes the materiality of symphonic mechanisms more transparent. It's like being able to see the pencil grid underneath the ink. I imagine it's precisely this quality which caused such music to be maligned in its day as second-rate; there would be, to a certain kind of Teutonically-minded critic, a danger in being confronted with the materiality of an artform held up as proof of the transcendent "depths" of the (Teutonic) soul (Watkins 2011). One 'B-grader' that I got particularly ensconced in was the one and only symphony (in G major) by Otto Olsson, a Swedish composer better known in his day as a virtuoso organist and church musician. So the story goes, no-one knew he had written the symphony, and it was found in a drawer only after his death. I found it curiously touching that Olsson had composed a work in this most public of musical genres as a strictly personal exercise. One aspect of Olsson's symphony that particularly attracted me was its slow-building yet transparent harmonic trajectories. I transcribed some of this material and used it as a prompt for my own harmonic explorations – material which ended up in the string chorales of *Pierre's* opening scene.

4.4 Part 1: "Nothing music"

As Bobbi and I started to talk about the form and components of the piece, Bobbi mentioned three foundational ideas. One was that there would be a long section—roughly 10 minutes—where "nothing happened". For reference Bobbi pointed me to the dance-cinema of Zbigniew Rybczyński: pieces like *Tango* (1981), where micro-dramas pile up on endless loop; and to a scene from Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó*

(1994), where locals in a shabby tavern carouse aimlessly for a solid 10 minutes of single-shot screen time while the accordionist in the corner repeats the same diabolical tune. Bobbi described this 'nothing music' as being 'the music of the place': the music that just plays incessantly, in a place of indeterminate character and identity – maybe a train station, or a cafe, or town square, lobby, waiting room, or maybe in fact a stage, or a dream, or all of these things at once. We also knew the pianist should feature, to establish the diegetic presence in this place of the piano-as-object.

This opening scene seemed prime territory to explore the 'estrangement' of symphonic building-blocks that I was interested in: to relieve these music-objects of the Romantic imperative to develop and redeem the tortured subject, and instead strand them in a kind of narrative purgatory. I hoped this approach would also pay off practically: in many ways, the narrative density of a symphony's developmental propulsions risks overwhelming any choreographic or theatrical action set to it. (It's no surprise that when Bobbi has previously used symphonic music, it's been theme & variation movements.) As an alternative formal frame, I was drawn to what Cassandra Miller describes as a musical logic of continuance: an "anti-developmental form, simply housing the material and continuing it" (Miller 59-60). Composing this opening section, for me, was like an exercise in directing a crowd scene. Some musical gestures are there all the time, waiting, pacing to and fro. Some come in for a time, do what they came to do, and leave again. Some have been sleeping in the corner and wake up with a start. Some we didn't notice were there until they're gone. Some walk in one door and straight out the other, never to be seen again. A curtain-twitcher periodically peers down on the action.

The piano theme in the opening section is adapted from Sergei Bortkiewicz's 1924 Piano Concerto no. 2 (another B-grader). This theme fascinated me because—despite its captivating catchiness—it proves undevelopable. In Bortkiewicz's hands, the theme first appears as a kind of second subject in the 1st movement: first in

the strings, then in the piano, then the horns briefly take it over before transitioning to different material. The theme returns at the beginning of the second movement, where Bortkiewicz takes its rhythmic motifs through a few harmonic modulations – but this 'development' feels contrived and didactic, as if being done for the sake of it rather than being motivated by the material itself. So Bortkiewicz gives up on it, moves on to completely unrelated material, and the theme is never heard from again. Somewhat hubristically, I played around with this same theme for hours, trying to figure out whether I'd have any better luck at transforming it. But no dice! Something about the theme made it refuse to budge (and here I deliberately role-play a thoroughly Romantic logic): especially its taut magnetic attraction to either a minor tonic or major dominant harmony. As a musical theme which possessed no desire to be anything other than what it was—but yet so alluring as to bear repeating—it was the perfect centrepiece for this opening scene. The decision that the theme's two phrases would repeat absolutely verbatim throughout was made in an effort to simplify the part for the dancer who would play it. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the challenge of working compositionally around this literal frame.

Of course, the grit in the oyster of this scene is the string chorales, whose yearning harmonic trajectory palpably opposes the non-teleology of everything else. I introduced these chorales largely due to an awareness that the scene would have to *end* somehow. If it were cinema, a jump cut would do the trick – but onstage, for my tastes, to arbitrarily *stop* risked coming off as feeble: especially given the intense Aristotelian setting the scene had established (there's nowhere else to go), and the dramatic arc and musical material to come (which had been composed first). Once the biggest and final harmonic apex is reached, the spell of the scene is somehow broken, and we *cannot* go back and continue with the piano theme, any more than a spoonful of jam can be stirred back out from a bowl of porridge. That the eventual trigger for the scene's implosion enters the scene only subtly, halfway through, struck me as an intriguing

musical equivalent of a hamartia, or of planned obsolescence. The scene's conspicuously climactic, yet inconclusive, ending also sets up an ongoing equivocation throughout *Pierre* around never-ending endings.

4.5 Part 2: "Folk Dance"

Bobbi's second idea for a formal pillar was that, in the middle of the piece, there would be a folk dance. A folk dance from where?, I asked. From nowhere, said Bobbi. It might even sound cliched!—she added, and mentioned Brahms's *Hungarian Dance no. 5*. There is of course a long history of composers orchestrating and adopting putative 'folk songs': not only Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* but Canteloube's *Chants d'Auvergne*, Berg's Violin Concerto, and Berio's *Folk Songs* to name only a few. It is a trope which betrays the perennial tension between the institutionally-fabricated, not-at-all-endemic apparatus of the symphony orchestra, and the impulse among its affiliates to naturalize the musical behavior of this strange behemoth. It is precisely what Said describes as the tendency to "forget" the connections and contingencies between "practices, individuals, classes, and formations" (336). And so I took the assignment of creating a 'folk dance from nowhere' as a prompt to attempt a folk dance whose 'native culture' was that of the symphony orchestra. That is to say, its musical characteristics would not approximate or imitate those of any identifiable (non-orchestral) musical tradition, but rather it would amplify *ad absurdum* the musical mechanisms honed by the orchestral repertoire to signify folkiness.

Even so, ironically, I felt a bit stuck as to how to begin this exercise without an actual 'folk tune' to work with. In an effort to speculate what the 'folk music' of ***this*** orchestra—the Royal Danish Orchestra—might be, I dug up a collection of music arranged for four-part men's choir, published in 1873 by the Copenhagen Student Singing Association, with subsequent printings in Stockholm and Oslo. What I found interesting about this document was its implicit socio-political project. The first section

of the volume comprises 'folk songs', neatly categorized by national origin, with most credited as Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian: attributions which strategically "forget" the centuries of mutual invasions and imperial re-arrangements within Scandinavia that give the lie to such tidy definitions. The last pages of the 'folk song' section offer an exotic degustation of one song each from France, Germany, Finland, Scotland, Greece, and Flanders. The rest and bulk of the volume (123 of its 156 songs) are songs by relatively contemporaneous composers. In a similar distribution to the folk song section, most are Danish, Swedish or Norwegian composers, but there are cameo appearances from the likes of Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn (whose lyrics have been translated into Danish).

It is interesting that the volume is thus divided: a kind of 'Old Testament' of seemingly timeless folk songs prefaces contemporary musical activity. In so doing, the music of these recent composers is implicitly legitimized as being of a piece with the 'national characters' represented by the folk songs. The volume thus seemed a quintessentially bourgeois project to consolidate stable national identities in the decades of Scandinavia's burgeoning constitutional monarchies. Indeed, there is a political urgency to this task: to define inviolable ethnic identities deserving of their own constitutional autonomy, rather than being pawns in imperial games (a timely assertion following the recent tussles over Schleswig-Holstein). At the same time, by nestling among these Scandinavian composers some representatives of a mini-musical-European Union, the editors place 'national' Scandinavian music in diplomatic dialogue with bourgeois Western European print culture. In short, if the Royal Danish Orchestra had its own 'folk music', I speculated it might look a lot like this volume: a 'folk music' which on the one hand confidently asserted the alignments between cultural identity and present boundaries of political power, but on the other, could in practice be seamlessly naturalized within homogeneous, pan-European bourgeois musical practices (like singing associations and, indeed, orchestras). Not

inconsequentially, the 1870s were also significant for the Royal Danish Theater, as it sought—following Denmark's shift to a constitutional monarchy—to reinvent itself as a public-serving institution and compete with popular new independent theaters. Indeed, the 'Gamle Scene' where *Pierre* was performed was built in 1874.

From this volume I selected two songs: deliberately one minor and one major (à la Brahms), and deliberately both in triple meter; I wanted to lend to this folkdance a churning, restless waltz momentum, rather than the clomping oom-cha squareness of duple/quadruple meter. The minor key song is described as Norwegian, though the lyrics are printed in Swedish; it is titled 'Fantasi' in the Copenhagen edition, and 'Erotisk Fantasi' in the Stockholm edition. The major key song is listed as Swedish, and titled 'Vermlandspolska' (presumably referring to the Swedish region of Värmland). Though the lyrics of the songs would not come into *Pierre*, they nevertheless make a pointed comparison. The 'Erotisk Fantasi' expresses romantic love in yearning, metaphysical terms (likely hence the editor's title): "How you always shine in my beautiful sky, life's morning dream and life's evening prayer! Earth and sky, I forget night and day, and of you I think only". In a case of passing from the sublime to the ridiculous, the 'Vermlandspolska' describes a distinctly more carnal kind of passion, almost onomatopoeically so: "oh girl, oh yes, oh girl, oh yes, all up the country road, oh yes". Lurching between these risibly different poetic registers I hoped might animate the two orchestral psyches I wanted to evoke: on the one hand, the ponderous transcendentalism of the Romantic symphony, and on the other, the orchestra's military-imperial complex, and its overwhelming display of brute, thrusting force of the kind Susan McClary diagnoses in Beethoven's 9th Symphony (2002, 128).

It should also be noted that there is a third tune, played on the violin by Eukene immediately before the orchestral 'folk dance'. Less important to me than what Eukene actually played was that she played really well, and played something she already had a personal connection to. So Bobbi and I asked Eukene to send us videos of her playing

her favourite things to play on the violin. Of the options Eukene sent, this was the one that elicited the strongest performance from her. It is a tune she had learned by ear from a family member, and which she understood to be of German origin (though Eukene herself is Basque).

4.6 Part 3: "Pierre"

The third musical element Bobbi wanted to incorporate was the song 'Pierre', by French singer-songwriter Barbara. Bobbi knew that the cast would include Corpus dancer Alma Toaspern, who had in fact sung another Barbara song in one of Bobbi's earlier projects with Corpus – so we knew that, with Alma, the delivery of the song would be in good hands. I was entranced by so many of the song's qualities, and was eager to employ a similar method as in *a loose affiliation* and *the way we look to a song*: that of excavating, abstracting, and transforming certain qualities as a way to generate musical material. For instance, I love how the saxophone shadowing the vocal line is panned way into the edges of the stereo field - like it's being played in the next room, or from a distant radio, or dredged up from the memory. I re-assigned this musical role to the onstage trumpeter—likewise distanced from the orchestra, pianist, and singer, in his own anachronistic world—in a sense relieving him of his duties to King Christian and instead signaling to a quite different material history of the instrument, one whose 'Nos. 1, 2 and 3' might be Louis, Dizzy and Miles. This prompted me to similarly reprise the military percussion from the opening scene (bass drum, crash cymbals, snare), but in an altered guise. I was also struck by the vivid images in the song's lyrics, and wanted to evoke their quality via orchestral textures and colours. The 'pretty rain' ("que c'est jolie la pluie") becomes a dripping harp figure; the cold coming in through the roof sounds like string tremolos sul ponticello; the silent creeping shadow ("l'ombre qui se glisse jusqu'à moi sans bruit") sneaks out of a

chromatic line in the violas. (It's also a useful kind of subtitling for those of us whose French is not so great.)

I also loved listening to various live vs. studio recordings of the song, and the different ways Barbara plays with the faster wordless outro. In every version, she finds a different rhythmic figuration on the piano, different harmonic variations, and different vocal melodies. I loved thinking about how the song had grown with Barbara over the decades – and indeed how all songs grow and change along with their keepers. I also imagined the thousands of people who have hummed along to the song on the radio or the record player. Such images are, in a sense, evidence that a vernacular song is more 'technique' than 'text': it is transmitted by 'know-how', and therefore exists ***as*** sensation in the body – and thus changes as the body changes. In composing an orchestral version of this outro, I imagined a heterophony of all these versions of the song, all at once: of the whole orchestra 'humming along' in their own idiosyncratic way. The overall harmonic template of Barbara's outros is based around a circle of 5ths, always returning to where it started, giving a sense of cyclical fatefulness. This lent itself to the passacaglia treatment—variations over a repeating harmonic template—which also relates to the opening section's formal principle of continuance and accumulation. I made a chart of as many harmonic variations of the 4-bar phrase's general harmonic function that I could think of, and so each repetition of the phrase is a slightly different harmonic progression. The double basses, celli and violas hold down this harmonic foundation in ever-varying figurations, while more and more woodwinds join in the 'humming along'. In fact I composed this section by humming along to a mock-up of the low string parts—in a similar process to other pieces in this portfolio—improvising until finding something that worked, and then transcribing it. (For the most part, *Pierre* was a giant Adobe Audition project before it was a Sibelius file.)

4.7 Form, narrative, & synchrony

Despite following these three formal guideposts ('nothing music' + 'folk dance' + 'Pierre'), for most of the composing process these materials were floating around as self-contained sketches. I didn't want to get too bogged down too early on by what the sequence of events would be; rather, I wanted to explore on its own terms the material that interested me and see what I could develop from it. The string chorales in Part I, and the piano theme, for instance, I had initially thought of as being two completely different sections. There were also innumerable sketches that ended up on the cutting room floor! Only fairly late in the game did Bobbi and I take stock of all the material on the table, and arrange it into a form:

I. 'This is the music of this place': orchestra with Mayo on piano (b. 1-299)
II. Alma sings 'Pierre' for the first time: solo voice & piano
III. Eukene: solo violin
IV. Tutti 'folk dance': orchestra (b. 311-517)
...with the coda that never ends
V. Alma sings 'Pierre' for the second time: piano & voice with orchestra (b. 518-588)
VI. Pierre: orchestral passacaglia (b. 589-715)

One of the most common pieces of feedback I get about *Pierre* is how closely intertwined the music and choreography seem to be. People therefore often ask how the piece came together; they are surprised when I tell them the score was finished two months before dance rehearsals began, and the choreography was developed almost entirely in situ, with the dancers, during the rehearsal period. As a matter of fact, I deliberately kept my in-process compositional rationale to myself, and shared with Bobbi only musical mock-ups with minimal commentary, in an effort not to limit or influence what she heard. It was always refreshing and productive to hear Bobbi's

feedback on the mock-ups, coming from a different angle. Once the score was finished and sent off, and Bobbi explained to me in fuller detail how she was envisating the characters and action of the piece, I was in fact quite alarmed – it seemed to me that we were imagining two utterly different worlds!

It is therefore telling that, in giving an exposition of the musical score for *Pierre*, I have said very little about the dramatic and choreographic action onstage. In a sense, the musical score has a life of its own, running parallel to the many counterpointing dramas which play out choreographically in the piece. *Pierre* deliberately confounds the attempt to read in it the kind of narrative clarity of most classical ballet (or even cinema): there are as many little tragedies congregating onstage as there are dancers, and charting a story depends on which protagonist you start with. The music, then, adds to this counterpoint its own little tragedies, its own protagonists. Even the woman who sings 'Pierre' is an enigma – is she singing for the people onstage? Who among them is even listening? Perhaps the most impactful way in which the score 'sets the scene' is that its anachronism brings to the stage a historicizing dimension. Against this backdrop, I hope one might be prompted to read these characters as complex individualized creatures, yet also understand that their own agency is bound up in their relationships to one another, the role they have been handed to play, and even the strange 'folk' rituals they participate in. At the very least what is clear in *Pierre* is that there is a man, a woman, and furtive allusions to a child (whether born, lost, or wanted, we do not know). But what begins as a kitchen-table drama gradually escalates into a crowd scene, a jury deliberation, a verdict, and a reckoning, in which every person onstage is just as implicated as the duo on whom the curtain opens. Whatever wrongs being judged or guilt being absolved are thus not the kind that weighs on one man's shoulders alone.

CHAPTER 5: *the power of moss* (2021)

the power of moss was written for a commission from Dr. Jenny Wollerman, an operatically-trained soprano, musicologist, and senior lecturer of voice performance at Te Kōkī The New Zealand School of Music. I was one of twenty-one composers Jenny commissioned to contribute a 3-minute piece for voice and piano to a printed anthology of contemporary classical art song by female composers from Aotearoa New Zealand. Jenny hoped this new repertoire would chiefly serve younger singers engaged in classically-oriented vocal practice: in particular, undergraduate students of vocal performance. Jenny's main ambition for the project was to expand the available repertoire by contemporary women composers—especially those with a connection to Aotearoa New Zealand—that would be appropriate for singers at this stage of vocal development.

What attracted me most to Jenny's project was the opportunity to cater to younger singers, and thereby engage critically with mainstream vocal pedagogy. My main reference point was my own experience of classical voice training as a high-schooler and undergraduate, and the successes, failures, pleasures and frustrations I experienced when approaching classical soprano repertoire as a young singer with a developing technique and eclectic musical interests.

the power of moss thus reflects my central priority that, in composing, I work consciously with the particular context for which a piece is made. On one hand, this piece is written in awareness of the institutionally-circumscribed norms of labour and practice that will shape its realization: that is, the expectations and priorities of conservatory voice training. For instance, I think of this piece as valuable 'cross-training' for a singer also studying Renaissance and Baroque music: it supports the development of techniques like vocal agility through the range, rhythmic precision, and skills for pitching & intonation in reference to implied harmonies. At the same

time, with this piece I also sought to expand the expressive range in which those techniques could be exercised – and to create an opportunity for young singers to apply techniques, expressive tools, and artistic flair available to them from other strands of their creative experience besides classical vocal idioms. Hence the piece has a flexible instrumental accompaniment, and invites both performers to ornament their parts in a stylistically heterogeneous way. Ideally, the singer & instrumentalist alike then return to their Bach/Handel arias/sonatas with a freshly invigorated personal repertoire of ornamental motifs, rhythmic impulses, and expressive stylings that equip them to approach this historical repertoire too with individualized elan.

5.1 Choosing a poem

Jenny had requested that each composer for the project set a text by a female New Zealand poet. While my recent vocal works had used texts of my own composition or collaging, I was happy in this instance to set an existing poem, anticipating that an engagement across artforms with another artist's work could extend my own musical predilections. In selecting an appropriate poem, my considerations were mainly guided by the anticipated future life of the piece, performed by younger singers. I sought out:

- A poem that could be sung by young people of a variety of backgrounds and identities. In other words, while the poem would be written by a female poet, a young person of any gender should be able to develop a personal connection to the poem's subject. Moreover, while supporting Jenny's vision that the anthology would cumulatively address pertinent social themes, and represent diverse creative activity in Aotearoa New Zealand, I was mindful of choosing a poem whose content and poetic voice a young person of various cultural backgrounds could represent with dignity. For instance, I read many poems which powerfully represented a poet's lived experience in reference to their

own cultural identity. I don't think it's inconceivable that a singer of a different cultural background might deliver a dignified performance of such a poem. But I think the dignity of their performance would depend on a thoughtful engagement with questions of positionality and relationality, and an awareness of how, as Stó:lo scholar Dylan Robinson describes, any "sonic encounter"—and therefore any musical performance— is "a space of subject–subject relation". (15) In my experience, these conversations are generally not well-scaffolded for students in a university-conservatory environment. I was therefore reluctant to contribute a piece which risked leading young musicians or their peers into situations at best awkward and at worst harmful if they weren't well guided through these considerations. I was also mindful of the nature of the published anthology in which this piece would appear: a document which—in the absence of any remarks to the contrary—makes its contents implicitly 'available' to anyone who owns a copy.[1] Further contributing to my decisions was, firstly, an awareness of my own position as a Pākehā/settler, and thus the limits around what of others' personal experiences my imaginative tools could effectively support; and secondly, a confidence in the knowledge that Jenny had engaged an artistically and culturally diverse cohort of contributors to the volume as a whole, so that the edition *would* serve students seeking repertoire aligned with their own cultural positioning.

- A poem whose 'voice' or subject could be effectively represented by a young vocalist still in the process of developing their own toolkit for dramatic expression in performance. That is, a fulfilling delivery of the poem/song would not *depend* on mature and sophisticated dramatic artistry. Nor should the poem

[1] An example of a published volume resisting this assumption of availability would be Robinson's monograph *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, an entire chapter of which a settler, or non-Indigenous, reader is explicitly instructed not to read – a strategy of "structural refusal" (23).

necessitate a particular expressive attitude that might not come comfortably or naturally to every singer. In other words, I didn't want a young singer to feel like they had to don a dramatic or expressive persona that was beyond their own experience. (By contrast, with classical operatic repertoire, young vocalists can be compelled to represent a dramatic persona by mimicking expressive tropes of the operatic genre.) For this reason I was drawn to poems with a fairly uninflected poetic voice, so the vocalist need not 'impersonate' anything but their own presence as a narrator-performer.

- A poem about neither romantic love nor heartbreak, in an effort to expand the emotional range of repertoire available for young singers, and young women especially.
- A poem that ultimately had an undertone of pragmatic optimism and resilience that might be somehow galvanizing to young people in their personal lives.

Further to the above considerations, as I read through several poems I was especially drawn to those with some striking formal or linguistic feature that might lend itself to an analogously striking—perhaps even quasi-ekphrastic—musical-rhetorical feature. I also looked for a poem whose subject and dramatic character would not merely *tolerate* the addition of music, but in fact be productively *transformed* into something quite different in a musical setting. In a similar vein, I was mindful that, often in the genre of classical art song, the poem being sung is made additionally available to its listeners in printed form – and that without this clarification the text might come off as quite opaque. By contrast, I hoped to find a poem which could come across well solely by being sung, without having to be 'revisited' on paper for its poetic impact to be appreciated.

The radical brevity and introversion of Jo Randerson's poem 'and' immediately intrigued me. In the end, it was precisely the poem's emotional ambiguity that made me want to take on the challenge of finding a musical character to accommodate it.

AND
although the
plants grew
for many days
they never got
any bigger but
only seemed to
be just
managing to
stay alive.
(2000, 51)

5.2 Anti-biggerness

What particularly interested me was finding a musical way to represent the poem's ethos of anti-growth. The biological processes of the plants in this poem are evidenced not by common understandings of 'growth': that is, by 'getting bigger'. Rather, the plants metabolize according to some other bio-logic – but what? The invitation to envisage (and musicalize) the nature of that more furtive biology struck me as a rich philosophical and imaginative exercise. The poem reminded me of the desert flora I passed by daily in San Diego, which over weeks and months would appear to be browning, slumping, and withering but then suddenly—almost overnight it would seem—shoot up a towering stem of flowers or seed pods.

While I was in correspondence with Jo, she shared with me an excerpt from a recent lecture in her series of experimental, participatory lecture-performances, 'Secret Art Powers'. Here she advances the philosophy of 'anti-biggerness' she had been exploring twenty years ago in this poem:

> And I want to leave you with a final unlikely metaphor to explain why I am optimistic that we can build fairer, kinder and more colourful realities where all people truly thrive, because it's not the power of the sword we need:
> But the power of moss
> The oldest surviving plant – like EVER
> It's not tall, it doesn't thrust up above everything else.
> Its not well-defined, doesn't make a grand statement, it's not shiny
> it just quietly and softly persists
> It's unstoppable, essential and its brand is known in every continent.

Whereas the poem on its own might be misread as despondent (those poor plants, barely managing to stay alive!), this passage beautifully affirms the poem's quiet optimism. Jo suggests that a periodic refusal to 'get bigger' is not merely a holding pattern, stop-gap, or short-term survival strategy triggered by unfortunate circumstances – but in fact a deliberate long-term strategy for ecosystem-wide continuance and thriving. It's also a neat encapsulation of the anti-colonial feminism that informs a lot of Jo's work as a Pākehā writer and theatre-maker in Aotearoa, which emphasizes participation, knowledge-sharing, and community-building over and above 'stardom'. And, on a personal note, I found this a buoyant philosophy to encounter 18 months into the Covid-19 pandemic, during which I had been learning to shelve (if not permanently dispose of) habits of thinking which evaluated personal growth and value according to visible factors like 'productivity' or professional success. To underscore these aspects of the poem's latent optimism, with Jo's permission, I titled the song-version *the power of moss*.

To energize this philosophy of 'anti-biggerness', I wanted the music to play against the visible stasis of the never-enlarging plants, and instead evoke their hidden metabolisms. This meant looking for ways to sustain some "softly persist[ing]" musical motion: hence the lilting yet irregular mixed meters and lithe tempo. In particular, the musical setting of the line "they never got any bigger" ironically proliferates as the phrase is repeated—with variations in text underlay—while increasing diminution and

variation in the instrumental line might be taken to represent subterranean, rhizomatic growth. At the same time, the vocal phrase transposes down a semitone with each repetition, conspicuously deflating the musical climax which preceded it ("for many days"), and literally reversing one of the most habitual mechanisms for engineering a sense of musical 'growth' (i.e. rising pitch). Such doggedly literal deployments of musical means appeal to me; they are a reminder of the often banal equivalences and encodings which constitute musical metaphysics. Composer Cassandra Miller describes these kinds of bald upward and downward pitch pathways as "iconic directionalities" representing essential binary oppositions like life and death, light and dark, hope or despair (Weeks 58). I had used a similarly transposing-looping theme in *a loose affiliation of alleluias*, in the Angel melody weaving through the Outro section. In that concerto, the transposing melody got somewhat swallowed up by the chaotic orchestration, so I was keen to repurpose the template in another piece where it could be more closely attended to. I like how a transposing-looping passage—especially as vocal material—allows a listener to perceive the subtle transformations of timbre as the melody inches down the range. In a metaphorical sense, it represents a time-lapsed sonic index of ageing – especially a woman's ageing.

5.3 Repetition & recursion

At this point I should briefly note what proved, for me, the major puzzle in composing this piece. Some legible repetition scheme seemed an apt way to suggest vegetal, fractal growth or cell division – but what material would be repeated, how, and where, I struggled to determine. When considering the role of longitudinal, or structural, repetition in the piece, I reflected on my interest in medieval formes fixes, which I previously explored by adopting a rondeau form for *Onomastic Gymnastics*. While Jo's poem would not allow for a wholesale adoption of a forme fixe, I wanted to embed some aspects of what I find perceptually satisfying about formes fixes (cf.

Elizabeth Randall Upton's analysis). In my listening, what is most musically memorable in a forme fixe is generally the beginnings and ends of stanzas, as well as any particularly striking material – like the climax of a phrase, or an unusual melodic or textural feature. To my modern ears, what happens in between is usually fairly *unmemorable*—not dull, but difficult to remember—by virtue of its homogeneous musical landscape and ever-eliding phrases. It is thus a satisfying sense of déjà vu to recognize material at the beginnings and ends of sections; but what happens in between feels like an adventure each time – as if I am a goldfish blithely swimming around a bowl, my surroundings dimly familiar but not immediately recognizable. With this piece, then, I looked for opportunities to repurpose especially memorable material at beginnings/ending/transitions, as structural guideposts: for instance, the opening gesture returns at b. 38, and is varied at b. 41-44 as well as b. 93-95; the vocal line at b. 13-22 returns with text and transposition at b. 99-108.

The nature of local repetition was the bigger puzzle. I was less attracted to verbatim repetition, and more attracted to asymmetrical, or varied repetition – I felt this would better suggest the hard-won *effort* of organic growth, and its susceptibility to external influence. The riddle was largely solved when, while working on the piece, I listened to Linda Catlin Smith's collected *Nocturnes* for piano—in a recording by Eve Egoyan—in which, amidst otherwise serpentine and ever-morphing musical landscapes, short fragments periodically get 'stuck on loop' and repeated verbatim several times until the music proceeds as before. In other words, repetition is not an inevitable or naturalized musical behavior – instead, it is stumbled upon, and frustrates the music's continuance. For these reasons I found Smith's deployment of repetition quite satisfying as a listener, and it informed my decision that, in my piece, sequential repetition would happen only twice: at "they never got any bigger", and at the end.

I should also note that my imaginative explorations of how to musicalize the secret life of plants were always tempered by the question of accessibility for young

musicians. For instance, the decision to recapitulate the melodic motif from "they never got any bigger" in the coda at b. 111 was made to set manageable limits around the amount of highly chromatic material in the piece – which is difficult for a singer to both learn aurally and execute technically. And, in a sense, the transposing pattern makes the piece its own etude. This dialectic of imagination versus discipline is to some extent at play in any creative process; it is yet another example of the continual negotiation between technique and agency – between historical bodies and present action.

In terms of how the piece was put together in practice, it was mostly a matter of sitting at the piano and improvising (a lot, painstakingly). For the most part, I would come up with the vocal line first, usually improvising aloud in a swoopy non-pitched voice to find an underlay for the words that I liked (e.g. how long/how many notes per syllable; where do the notes go up vs. down), before finding pitches to precisely realize this underlay and contour. Following my reflections on the role of repetition in the piece, I gravitated towards recursive loops around cadential figurations (e.g. the A-G#-F# figure in b. 24-6, and a similar Db-C-Bb figure in b. 45-48), vacillations between different chromatic inflections of the same pitch (e.g. the back-and-forth between A sharp and A natural in b. 32-37) and recursive returns to melodic figurations from earlier in the piece (e.g. b. 9-11 recurring in b. 48-50). In general, the instrumental counterpoint was composed second, with the rhythms solidifying as I improvised slight variations of how the two lines fit together. (I would record a few different takes of me singing/playing, then transcribe the version I liked best.) What I continue to find productive about this process of contrapuntal improvisation is that it lets me think in terms of the quality and character of *intervals* – both melodic and harmonic – rather than in terms of vertical or functional harmony, whose many theoretical associations can clutter my thinking and listening.

5.4 Vocality & the developing voice

The striking brevity of Jo's poem offered me an opportunity to continue exploring the melismatic vocal style from my earlier pieces. In *the power of moss*, phrases are delivered mostly syllabically at first—so as to be intelligible—and are then repeated melismatically, abstracting the world into a phoneme and musical gesture. I think of this as 'singing about singing': vocal lines which lean into pleasurable vocal impulses, and which draw their expressive resources from the entrainments of the (/my) voice itself – conditioned as it is by historical voices and repertoires.

At the same time, in composing the music, I continued to be guided by considerations of how to showcase the strengths – and support the weaknesses – of a developing singer training in classical idioms. Again, my own experience as a baby soprano served for reference. As a young singer, my vocal weaknesses were generally exhibited when:

- trying to sing loudly – especially between the two passagi (roughly G4 - E5), where pushing too hard vocally would often destabilize tone and intonation;
- sustaining notes of long durations, which revealed any glitches in diaphragmatic or laryngeal control (often exacerbated by performance anxiety);
- singing passages with a lot of rapidly delivered syllabic text, where ever-changing vowel shapes also risked destabilizing tone, intonation, and resonance alignment;
- trying to sing repertoire that is usually sung by a very particular voice type (e.g. opera arias sung in the bel canto style, or musical theater repertoire sung with a particular vocal placement & resonance) - so if my own voice didn't 'fit' that archetype, my performance would sound deficient.

On the other hand, my light, straight-tone vocal quality was well-accommodated by the following features, which I tried to privilege in this piece:

- agile musical lines, always in motion, especially on one vowel along scalar and arpeggiated patterns familiar from vocal warm-ups and technical exercises;
- a softer dynamic range, with a lighter accompanimental texture that I didn't have to 'fight' against to balance with;
- passages whose leaping movement between registers allowed me to easily 'flip' back and forth between chest & head voice, and avoid gradual transitions between these registers (which can also be destabilized by performance anxiety).

Of course, these quirks are fairly particular to my own experience—and the soprano experience—and not necessarily the case for all young singers or voice types. But I hope the musical language these considerations led me to might nevertheless suit various vocal ranges, voice types, and expressive stylings – and especially voices that don't fit the *bel canto* mould. I was mindful that many vocalists who study vocal performance at an undergraduate level are neither chiefly interested in—nor vocally suited for—repertoire which presupposes a classically operatic voice and delivery. I think this piece would sound just as awesome sung by a vocalist steeped in expressive techniques of jazz or musical theater as in *bel canto*. Incidentally, I think the piece would also sound great if the vocalist were amplified, and would lend itself well as an exercise in mic technique.

The instrumental accompaniment for 'the power of moss' is flexible in that it is not a piano accompaniment per se: it works on the piano, but could be played on any 12-tone instrument with a similar range to the singer's. Given that this piece would appear in an art song anthology, I wanted to offer young singers the latitude to make creative decisions about how their own vocal qualities could inform a unique 'take' on the piece. A singer can decide, for instance, what instrument would fit best with their own vocal quality, and the stylistic direction in which they want to take the piece. This

flexibility also offers a singer latitude in choosing their musical collaborators: a singer does not need to engage a professional piano accompanist to perform the piece, but could instead team up with a peer. A singer also needs only modest piano facility to accompany themselves. Rehearsing and performing with expert accompanists can surely be an enriching musical experience. However, when a singer's solo repertoire is limited to pieces which require a highly skilled pianist to perform, their opportunities for exercising and sharing their artistry are limited. They can only perform in spaces equipped with a piano (or perhaps an organ), and a fee must be usually paid to the accompanist in order to perform. It is through these logistical strictures, Loren Kajikawa notes, that classical music pedagogy can "prevent imagining alternative ways of coming together as musicians and as people" (157). I hope that, by offering flexibility in the accompaniment, this piece might open up the settings in which a singer can share their artistry, the audiences with whom they can share it, and the collaborative partnerships they can build.

Although this piece strives to accommodate the strengths and weaknesses of younger voices, it is of course not without its challenges! The sparse accompaniment certainly leaves the voice much more exposed than a classical soloist is accustomed to, and while the accompaniment part often reinforces or 'gives' the singer their pitch, elsewhere crunchy dissonances between the two lines require the singer to be very secure in their part. Moreover, it's unusual for a classically-oriented singer to encounter mixed meter in solo repertoire. From this arises the old saw that 'singers can't count', usually muttered as institutionally-coded misogyny which perpetuates the stereotype of the brainless, unthinking soprano. But when it comes to musical skills, you are what you eat – which is to say, a musician training in a given discipline develops the skills necessitated by the common repertoire for that discipline. So, I hope this piece might serve as a fun and productive rhythmic etude which offers young musicians an opportunity to get to grips with mixed meter, and thus add it to their 'diet' of rhythmic

skills. On the whole, *the power of moss* certainly exhibits the singer's virtuosity, but—rather than a vocal virtuosity premised on big sounds and high notes—it is the virtuosity of a small voice, working through a vital stage of growth without necessarily getting any bigger.

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