

**Murder, She Sang:
A Progression on Sopranos and Death**

by

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DEDICATION

For the women who are told they can have it all, and are then told they must make choices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No success is achieved through the efforts of a single individual. I offer sincere gratitude and many thanks to the professors at the University of Michigan who guided me through this journey. Special acknowledgment goes to Stephen Lusmann, George Shirley, and Dr. Naomi André, whose support and encouragement have enabled me to sing with my best voice and remain focused on the tasks at hand. I also wish to acknowledge and thank the Center for the Education of Women, whose financial support and mentorship helped make the completion of this degree possible.

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To my two children, Elliott and Brenda: I thank you for the patience and love you have had for me as your mother throughout this process. I also wish to thank those who have offered their time and love to watch over you when I could not.

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ABSTRACT

Two recitals and an opera role were performed in lieu of a written dissertation.

The following program notes and character analysis represent the summation of my creative, scholarly, and vocal accomplishments as a doctoral student at the University of Michigan. Although all projects were performed and filmed during the COVID-19 pandemic without a live audience in attendance, the levels of musicality, dramatic intention and technical expertise are representative of the skills attained throughout my degree.

Performing the operatic role of Mimì in Stephen Lusmann's English adaptation of *La Bohème* and the two dissertation recitals, *That's Chicago* and *The Murder Ballad*, demonstrate my strong commitment to utilizing my native language of American English to tell the stories of women through sung theater. This collection of performances also balances the under-representation of women as both poets and composers in the operatic and classical vocal repertoire, with more than 50% of the contributing creators of text and music being women.

All performances were filmed in adherence with the COVID-19 safety protocols established by each performance location. The role of Mimì and accompanying character analysis in this document explore the nuance and inevitability of Mimì's death as painted by

Giacomo Puccini's romantic vocal lines. *That's Chicago* uses the music and texts of Richard Hundley, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Andrew Gerle, Libby Larsen, Todd Hearon, and Carrie Magin to interweave the fictional stories of women in late 19th and early 20th century Chicago with that of real-life serial killer Dr. H. H. Holmes. The final piece in this trilogy, *The Murder Ballad*, showcases the evolution of the traditional murder ballad and the commonality of violence against women in music, beginning with mid-17th century Scotland, 19th century Appalachia, and finally, in *INTERSTATE*, a chamber work I commissioned and co-authored. *INTERSTATE* is inspired by the friendship between Aileen Wuornos (known as America's first female serial killer) and her childhood friend, Dawn Botkins, and makes use of the traditional American murder ballad, "Banks of the Ohio," as well as giving birth to several new murder ballads. The collection of all three of these performances displays an evolution of performative death for the soprano in vocal music.

Recital 1: In lieu of a recital, the operatic role of Mimì in Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* was performed on August 30th, 2020 at North Hills Christian Reformed Church in Troy, Michigan. English Adaptation by Stephen Lusmann. Performed with piano; Jean Schneider, pianist. Directed by Maryanne Telese and conducted by Stephen Lusmann.

Recital 2: *That's Chicago*, performed and recorded on November 22nd, 2020 at Rosary Cathedral in Toledo, Ohio. Kathleen Kelly, pianist.

Recital 3: *The Murder Ballad*, performed and recorded March 21st, 2021 at the Wolfe Center for the Arts at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. Kathleen Kelly, pianist.

CHAPTER I

Mimi in *The Bohemians*

The Bohemians is an updated adaptation of Giacomo Puccini's 1896 opera *La Bohème*. It features a contemporary English libretto and truncated musical arrangement, both by Stephen Lusmann. Filming an opera about two sets of lovers during a global pandemic that requires physical distancing between cast members was a challenge. After a week of masked rehearsals and the singers spaced twenty feet apart, *The Bohemians* was successfully filmed at North Hills Christian Reformed Church in Troy, Michigan on August 30th, 2020.

There's something about Mimi

Even with an updated and translated libretto, the role of Mimì in this adaptation differs very little from Puccini's original opera. *La Bohème* was Puccini's fourth opera, and the second of his collaborations with librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. It was officially based on Henri Murger's novel, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*. In reality, it aligns more closely with Murger's own dramatic play, *La vie de Bohème*. At the time of Puccini's composition, however, the play was under copyright, while the novel was not (Gerchman and Steigerwalt). Mimì in operatic form is a composite of two of Murger's characters; Mimì and Francine.

How does a 21st century soprano go about creating a character originally written to showcase Victorian era feminine ideals? Mimì exists only to fulfill Rodolfo's poetic fantasies. Her first words are, "Excuse me." She is knocking on his door, hoping her neighbor can relight her candle. His reaction is to exclaim that there is a woman at his door. It would not matter who that woman was. It is Christmas Eve, and a young man who fancies himself a poet is looking for love. Just eight measures of music into her entrance, Mimì has a coughing fit, letting us know

that she is significantly ill. This signals to Rodolfo that she is in need of saving and his hero complex immediately kicks in. She is flattered and enjoys the attention, but Rodolfo's care doesn't come without a red flag. After convincing her to stay, he tells her about himself. He woos her with his poetry:

*All my dreams and visions,
Swift as the wind departed.
But truly I don't mind it,
Because hope has replaced them
Hope and expectation.*

It is on the word, "expectation," the melodic climax of his aria, that the red flag waves. He is already creating the woman that he wants Mimì to be before she has shared anything about herself. A love affair built on hope and expectation is not one long for this world.

Mimì's first aria, "I'm always called Mimì," answers Rodolfo's introduction. She is already aware of his interests and what he values in life. After explaining that she is a seamstress who makes artificial flowers in her free time, she says:

*They speak to me of love, of love and springtime.
They speak of dreams, of visions, of illusions.
Things of wonder, that you might call poetic.
You understand me?*

By asking Rodolfo if he understands her, Mimì is letting him know that she understands him. The flowers that she creates are like his poetry. The first line of the above text is the first melodic climax of this aria, from an F#5 to A5. Mimì's climax is a minor 3rd; a single, yet important, half-step smaller than Rodolfo's climax of a major 3rd in his aria.

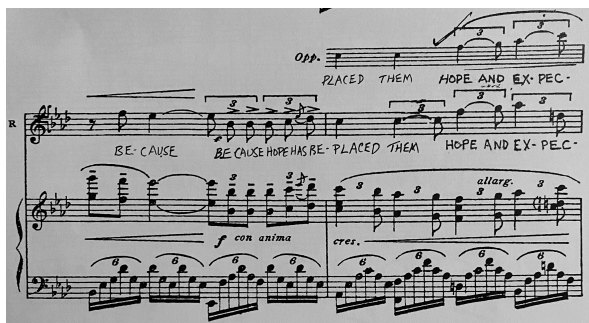


Figure 1. Rodolfo's aria climax

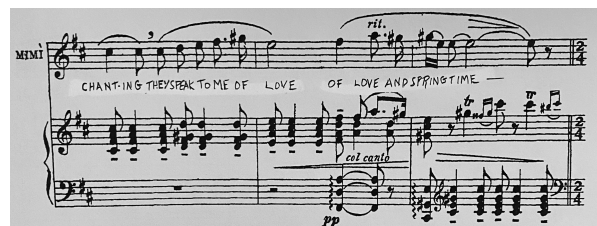


Figure 2. Mimì's opening aria climax

This isn't to say that Mimì isn't attracted to Rodolfo. She absolutely is. There is a co-dependent relationship that relies on her needing Rodolfo, and him needing to be needed by her. It begins with the candle, and then in the duet immediately following their introductory arias. In "I can't help but adore you" (known in the original opera as "O soave fanciulla"), Rodolfo uses extreme flattery on Mimì, and it works. By the time she joins him, it is in forte unison octaves, "Ah, I'm full of happiness." Mimì goes on, "And you alone ignite these feelings." By the end of the three minute duet, Mimì has already said the "L" word ("with abandon," as noted in the music), and the two walk off arm-in-arm to meet Rodolfo's friend at Café Momus.

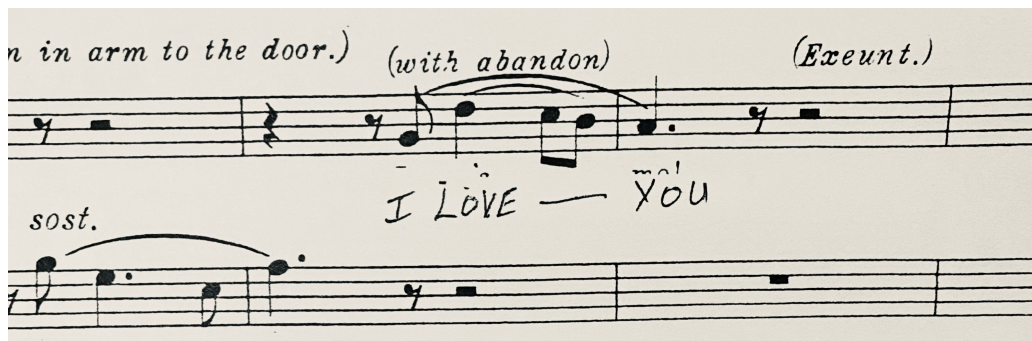


Figure 3. Mimi/Rodolfo duet excerpt

Once inside the café, Rodolfo introduces Mimì to Marcello, who deems her of "most worthy adoration." Mimì is wearing a new scarf that Rodolfo bought her on their way to the café. She sings, "I must confess, it's what I've wished to buy for such a long time. He saw I liked it, I said not a word." Within the first hour of meeting, Mimì has once again established herself as the enabler to Rodolfo's co-dependency. She goes on to sing, "A man who sees into a woman's heart is very special. He knows what love is." Mimì has communicated to Rodolfo that the more he does for her, the more she loves him.

When Musetta enters the café, Mimì is intrigued. At first impression, Musetta is the opposite of Mimì. Musetta is loud, outwardly sexual, and openly attention-seeking. As she sings her aria, “When I walk by” (Quando m’ en’ vo’), Mimì sings a counter melody from the standpoint of an objective observer. When Musetta’s vocal line ascends, Mimì’s responds with a descending line. Puccini has used their vocal lines to show the difference between the two women. However, in the final bars of Musetta’s aria, when all four characters join, Mimì and Musetta suddenly sing in perfect unison, ascending in an arpeggio to an accented B5, showing that perhaps, they are not so different after all.

The truth about Mimì and the toxic climax of her relationship with Rodolfo comes to a head in her opening Act III duet with Marcello. She has come to Marcello for his advice and help to break things off once and for all with Rodolfo. She confesses to Marcello that Rodolfo is jealous and irrationally suspicious of her, that they fight, and that she knows that it’s best if they break up for good. Yet, she also tells Marcello that in the middle of their fighting the previous evening, Rodolfo ran away and screamed at her, “It’s all over.” If what Mimì truly wanted was for it to be over, then it could have been right there. She didn’t need Marcello’s help; Rodolfo left her. That isn’t actually what she wanted. She wanted to be the one who left him. She wanted to know that he was miserable without her. She needed his adoration and to be seen as the perfect woman.

Of course, Mimì is not perfect, and she, by simply being human and not a poetic fantasy, would fall short in Rodolfo’s eyes. Rodolfo confides in Marcello that he had lost interest in her once before, but “looking into Mimì’s sparkling eyes” his “love was awakened.” Rodolfo seems confused that it didn’t last and their love, once again, is dead. He has put the impetus of love on a part of Mimì’s anatomy. He then complains of her flirting, with “every

glance so beguiling.” Rodolfo is addicted to his feelings and mistakes all of his physical reactions of being turned on by Mimi’s eyes as something she consciously does to seduce every man she looks at.

Mimi overhears all of this. Once again, if what she wanted was to get away from Rodolfo and be out of the relationship for good, this would have been more fuel to make it finite. In perhaps Puccini's greatest insult to Mimi, when Mimi overhears Rodolfo telling Marcello that she is dying, she is surprised. This insinuates that Rodolfo knew and understood more about her illness than she did. At mention, and as when they first met, Mimi has a coughing fit and her hiding place is given away. Rodolfo runs to her side.

In Mimi’s second aria, “I’m leaving, but we’ll stay friends” (*Donde lieta usci*), Mimi instructs Rodolfo to gather her things; her ring, her prayer book, and all of her other belongings. Even in breaking up, she is enabling his codependency by asking him to pack her things so that she can leave him. As a souvenir, she leaves him with the scarf that he bought her the night that they met. It is significant that she decides to leave the material possession that represents their love with him, instead of holding onto it for comfort in her last days. This solidifies the fact that she is Rodolfo’s fantasy, and so puts his needs before her own.

Mimi’s aria ends with, “Goodbye. We part as friends.” In music and text, this is a repetition of one of the first lines of the aria. She assures him that they will be friends. Rodolfo does not seem like the type of person who is capable of being friends with an ex-lover. His emotions run hot and cold and he spends his penniless days trying to turn the world and the people he loves into romantic poems built on dreams. Even as Mimi lets him down gently, his response is, “Now they’re gone, all the dreams we shared together. Goodbye to all that I have loved.”

Poetry is intoxicating; so is being told that you are all anyone has ever loved. This is why Rodolfo and Mimì continue to get back together. They each feed the other's weaknesses. Immediately following Mimì's aria the quartet begins. Musically, it functions first as two separate duets (between Mimì and Rodolfo, and between Marcello and Musetta). Rodolfo and Mimì convince each other that winter is no time to be alone; they will stay together until the spring. After all four voices join in unison octaves, just as they did on Christmas Eve at Café Momus, Musetta and Marcello part ways. Their love affair has soured again. Mimì sings in a near whisper, "I am yours always." After restating the plan to break up in the spring, she continues, "I would be happy if winter lasted forever."

The final scene of the opera begins with Rodolfo and Marcello lamenting the loss of their lovers. We can assume that it is springtime and Mimì kept true to her word, or perhaps their love faded again, and they parted ways for different reasons. Marcello remarks that he saw Mimì dressed up and getting into a limousine. After the two men blame their lack of artistic output on the women they tried to control, they have a pretend sword fight. Musetta interrupts. Having heard a rumor that Mimì had broken up with the rich man she was seeing and was close to death, she found her and brought her to the apartment.

Mimì is too weak to climb the stairs. Rodolfo offers her a glass of water. Mimì, knowing that she will die any moment, is happy to see him. Being so near to death allows her to enter back into Rodolfo's fantasy world of poetry. It doesn't matter that there is no food or warmth, or that Rodolfo, as much as he claimed to love her, never got a paying job to help take care of her in her illness. It doesn't matter that Rodolfo has to rely on Musetta selling her earrings to buy a pair of gloves and some medicine, and then allows her to lie so that he can take credit for it. This is the great tragedy; the character who needed to be needed could not

step up and provide help when the person he claimed to love was dying. She did need him; she needed him to act. She didn't need flowery words or dreams of a future together. It's why she left; but none of that matters when you are minutes away from death. So, you cling to the beauty; you allow sweet words and memories of possibility to bathe your soul and bring comfort so that you might leave this world feeling loved.

When Mimì is alone with Rodolfo, she gives him the greatest gift that she can; she enters his world and tell him everything she thinks he wants to hear. For the first time, she speaks in sweeping, poetic metaphors. She compares their love to “the sea, far beyond the vast horizon.” By speaking his poetic language, Mimì lets Rodolfo know that all is forgiven. As they reminisce about the night that they met, the music from the beginning of the opera returns. When Rodolfo repeats the first line of his opening aria, “Your tiny hand is freezing,” the memory is bittersweet and interrupted with a final coughing episode.

Knowing that Mimì is near death allows Mimì and Rodolfo to rekindle their fantasy world of intense infatuation and romance. The feelings they have for each other have always been real, but the irrational passion of youth cannot be sustained. Romance dictates that they must either break up permanently or one of them must die. Mimì is the one who knocked on Rodolfo's door and entered his world; he never entered hers, and that is why she is the character who must die. This way, the dream of Mimì as the ideal lover lives on in the poet's memory.

The story of *La Bohème*, and so, of *The Bohemians*, is one adored by opera audiences around the globe. According to Opera Base (operabase.com), *La Bohème* is consistently one of the top four most commonly produced operas around the globe. Although Mimì and Rodolfo both struggle to maintain a healthy relationship, they are

lovable because they are recognizable. As an actress, the job is to never judge the characters you inhabit, but to become them. As a writer, the opposite is true. There is a reasonable chance that the personality flaws that inhibit Mimì and Rodolfo from being able to make their relationship work would have been outgrown by each of them. There is also a reasonable chance that had either of them been more mature, their relationship never would have started. Only the young and oblivious would confess her everlasting love to a penniless stranger on Christmas Eve. This suspension of disbelief; this poetry combined with beautiful music and sung by powerful voices, creates an escape for audiences that feels like magic. This is grand opera at its finest.

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CHAPTER II

That's Chicago

Jennifer Cresswell, *soprano* and Kathleen Kelly, *piano*

November 22, 2020
Rosary Cathedral, Toledo OH

Three Songs

Richard Hundley (1931-2018)

Afternoon On A Hill
The Giver of Stars The
Taxi

Six Sandburg Songs

Andrew Gerle (b. 1972)

Mamie
Gone
Limited
Night Movement
Jazz Fantasia
Vaudeville Dancer

The Peculiar Case of Dr. H.H. Holmes

Libby Larsen (1950 -)

1. I State My Case
2. As a Young Man
3. I Build My Business
4. Thirteen Ladies and Three Who Got Away
5. Evidence

Mnemosyne

Carrie Magin (b. 1974)

That's Chicago

Program Notes

This recital is dedicated to women and the strides we have made towards independence and equality. I have chosen to forgo the traditional recital gown in exchange for a formal tuxedo. This is done proudly in homage to the numerous female jazz singers of the 1920s who were accustomed to performing in tuxes and were forced to exchange them for more feminine attire once given a record deal. Due to COVID-19 and a sudden loss of both performance venue and recording engineer, this recital was self-recorded at Rosary Cathedral in Toledo, Ohio. The Peculiar Case of Dr. H. H. Holmes is traditionally performed with a prepared piano. Due to venue restrictions, it is presented here without preparation.

Creating drama in recital format

The human voice has one great advantage over all other instruments; it has the ability to use words. As a performer, I find the text to have equal value to the music that I sing. When given the freedom to self-curate a recital, the motivation for choosing a piece must be in the words. Beyond that, piecing together song repertoire to create a dramatic through-line makes for an artistically satisfying experience for both the performer and audience. Every note we sing is theater.

The idea for *That's Chicago* developed in the summer of 2020. The previous season, we performed a short recital tour that included two of the sets (the Hundley and the Larsen) from this recital. When my artistic partner came across the Sandburg pieces by Andrew Gerle, an idea was born. Five of the six songs in Gerle's cycle use text from Carl Sandburg's Chicago Poems. The subject of Larsen's cycle, H. H. Holmes, built a murder mansion that took up a city block on Chicago's north side. Everything was coming together beautifully.

The Gerle/Sandburg cycle is the only piece on this recital where the composer and poet are both men. Sandburg's poems do, however, focus on named women; Mamie, Chick Lorimer, and Elsie Flimmerwon. I decided to tell their stories.

Mamie

Mamie longs for adventure and to be loved. She longs to be happy (*Afternoon on a Hill*). Small-town living is suffocating her. She takes off for Chicago (*Mamie*), only to find that her boredom and loneliness have not been cured by a simple location change. Frustrated by her job in the basement of a department store, she decides to head west (*Limited*). On this train, she meets a “man in the smoker.” It is Dr. Henry Howard Holmes. He tells her that he is headed for Omaha. She has no idea that Holmes has just murdered his business partner, Benjamin Peitzel, and is supposed to be accompanying Peitzel’s two small children to Nebraska to be with relatives (in reality, he has murdered them on the train and stuffed them in his trunk). Mamie finds him charming and he convinces her to come back to the city with him (*Night Movement*).

Chick

We meet Chick as she is falling in love (*The Giver of Stars*). After a romantic tryst, she leaves to chase her dreams of becoming an actress in Chicago (*Taxi*). The narrator, a woman with her own deep affections for Chick, formally introduces us (*Gone*). Chick is "a wild girl keeping a hold on the dream she wants" with soft hair that blows under her wide hat as she laughs. It’s clear why everyone loves Chick, but nobody knows why she left without saying goodbye.

Jump ahead twenty years. Jazz music has taken over the cultural scene (*Jazz Fantasia*). The narrator, who has been enjoying the show, finds its star, Elsie Flimmerwon. She has been searching for Elsie for years and discovered her name on a lit-up sign while on her way to work in downtown Chicago. After witnessing two men brawling over Elsie at the top of the stairs, she slips out the back door of the speakeasy and waits for Elsie (Vaudeville Dancer).

Chick Lorimer left town after discovering she was pregnant. Unwed, she and her beau ran off to Chicago. Four years later, the narrator, who never stopped loving Chick, finds her working in a grape arbor. Elsie, her daughter, is nearby. Chick's husband shows up, with clear indications of both alcoholism and advanced syphilis (the locomotor ataxia shuffle). The narrator doesn't come forward but recalls the last words she ever heard Chick say, "You little fool, keep off the street!" Seeing what her life has become, the narrator disappears. She doesn't know that after her husband's death, and left with a small child to care for, Chick took a job as a maid in the house of Dr. H. H. Holmes, and eventually became one of his victims. She has returned to find Elsie; she has become the star her mother had always dreamed of being.

H. H. Holmes

Dr. Henry Howard Holmes has been caught on a train headed west and is arrested for the murder of his business partner, Benjamin Peitzel. He is brought into his empty murder mansion by the police, hoping he will lead them to evidence. He looks around and is instantly reminded of the souvenirs (*I State My Case*). Overwhelmed by his surroundings, Holmes cannot help but brag about his accomplishments (*As a Young Man, I Build My Business*). Realizing that he has far more victims than originally thought, the police bring him back to their station, where he continues, and perhaps elaborates upon, his confession. Throughout *Thirteen Ladies and Three Who Got Away*, the possibility is there for any number of these women to be Mamie or Chick Lorimer. Women during this time changed their names upon arriving in Chicago, determined to make a clean break from the small town lives they previously led. Also, newspapers often got it wrong. At least two of the victims named by Holmes in his confessions and published in Chicago newspapers were later found to be alive and living in other parts of the country.

It is not until the final song in the cycle (*Evidence*) that we learn the full range of his derangement (two human ribs, one partially consumed).

Elsie Flimmerwon, the Vaudeville star, walks down a street on the north side of Chicago. She sees smoke, and discovers a giant building, taking up an entire city block, burning to the ground. It is the murder mansion of famed serial killer, H. H. Holmes. Elsie stands, transfixed on the flames, remembering her early childhood when she and her mother, Chick, lived on the second floor. Chick's ghost merges from the flames, providing comfort and words of wisdom (*Mnemosyne*). That's Chicago.

The Music

Richard Hundley was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1931. A long-time chorister of the Metropolitan Opera, he passed away in New Jersey in 2018 (*Legacy*). His songs have been sung by high school students and international opera stars alike. The three pieces in this set were written specifically for Jamie Barton (*Afternoon on a Hill* and *The Taxi*) and Marilyn Horne (*The Giver of Stars*).

Afternoon on a Hill

*I will be the gladest thing
Under the Sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one.
I will look at cliffs and clouds
With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
And the grass rise.
And when lights begin to show
Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
And then start down!*

The Giver of Stars

*Hold your soul open for my welcoming.
Let the quiet of your spirit bathe me
With its clear and rippled coolness,
That, loose-limbed and weary, I find rest,
Outstretched upon your peace, as on a bed ivory.
Let the flickering flame of your soul play all about me,
That into my limbs may come the keenness of fire,
The life and joy of tongues of flame,
And, going out from you, tightly strung and in tune,
I may rouse the blear-eyed world,
And pour into it the beauty which you have begotten.*

The Taxi

*When I go away from you
The world beats dead
Like a slackened drum.
I call out for you against the jugged stars
And shout into the ridges of the wind.
Streets coming fast,
One after the other,
Wedge you away from me,
And the lamps of the city prick my eyes
So that I can no longer see your face.
Why should I leave you
To wound myself upon the sharp edges of the night?*

Composer Andrew Gerle has won numerous awards, including the Richard Rodgers Award and the Jonathan Larson Award. His works have appeared on and off Broadway, and at the New York City Opera. (Gerle)He is currently on faculty at Yale University. In addition to composing, Andrew Gerle is an accomplished lyricist, author, and pianist, having performed with Jennifer Holliday, Shirley Jones, Brian Stokes Mitchell and Liz Callaway. Six Sandburg Songs was written for the 100th anniversary of Manhattan School of Music with soprano Cree Carrico and the composer at the keyboard.

Mamie

*Mamie beat her head against the bars of a little Indiana town and dreamed of romance and big things off somewhere the way the railroad trains all ran.
She could see the smoke of the engines get lost down where the streaks of steel flashed in the sun and when the newspapers came in on the morning mail she knew there was a big Chicago far off, where all the trains ran.
She got tired of the barber shop boys and the post office chatter and the church gossip and the old pieces the band played on the Fourth of July and Decoration Day
And sobbed at her fate and beat her head against the bars and was going to kill herself
When the thought came to her that if she was going to die she might as well die
struggling for a clutch of romance among the streets of Chicago.
She has a job now at six dollars a week in the basement of the Boston Store
And even now she beats her head against the bars in the same old way and wonders if there is a bigger place the railroads run to from Chicago where maybe there is romance and big things
and real dreams
that never go smash.*

Gone

*Everybody loved Chick Lorimer in our town.
Far off.
Everybody loved her.
So we all love a wild girl keeping a hold
On a dream she wants.
Nobody knows now where Chick Lorimer went.
Nobody knows why she packed her trunk... a few old things
And is gone-
Gone with her little chin
Thrust ahead of her
And her soft hair blowing careless
From under a wide hat.
Dancer, singer, a laughing passionate lover.
Were there ten men or a hundred hunting Chick?
Were there five men or fifty with aching hearts?
Everybody loved Chick Lorimer.
Nobody knows where she's gone.*

Limited

*I am riding on a limited express, one of the crack trains of the nation.
Hurling across the prairie into blue haze and dark air go fifteen all-steel coaches holding a thousand people.
(All the coaches shall be scrap and rust and all the men and women laughing in the diners and sleepers shall pass to ashes.)
I ask a man in the smoker where he is going and he answers: "Omaha."*

Night Movement - New York

*In the night, when the sea-winds take the city in their arms,
And cool the loud streets that kept their dust noon and afternoon;
In the night, when the sea-birds call to the lights of the city,
The lights that cut on the skyline their name of a city;
In the night, when the trains and wagons start from a long way off
For the city where the people ask bread and want letters;
In the night the city lives too—the day is not all.
In the night there are dancers dancing and singers singing,
And the sailors and soldiers look for numbers on doors.
In the night the sea-winds take the city in their arms.*

Jazz Fantasia

*Drum on your drums, batter on your banjos,
sob on the long cool winding saxophones.
Go to it, O jazzmen.*

*Sling your knuckles on the bottoms of the happy tin pans,
let your trombones ooze, and go husha-
husha-hush with the slippery sand-paper.*

*Moan like an autumn wind high in the lonesome treetops,
moan soft like you wanted somebody terrible, cry like a
racing car slipping away from a motorcycle cop, bang-bang!
you jazzmen, bang altogether drums, traps, banjos, horns, tin cans —
make two people fight on the top of a stairway and scratch each other's eyes
in a clinch tumbling down the stairs.*

*Can the rough stuff . . . now a Mississippi steamboat pushes
up the night river with a hoo-hoo-hoo-oo . . . and the green lanterns
calling to the high soft stars . . . a red moon rides on the
humps of the low river hills . . . go to it, O jazzmen.*

Vaudeville Dancer

*ELSIE FLIMMERWON, you got a job now with a jazz outfit in vaudeville.
The houses go wild when you finish the act shimmying a fast shimmy to The Livery Stable Blues.
It is long ago, Elsie Flimmerwon, I saw your mother over a washtub in a grape arbor
when your father came with the locomotor ataxia shuffle.
It is long ago, Elsie, and now they spell your name with an electric sign.
Then you were a little thing in checked gingham and your mother wiped your nose and said:
You little fool, keep off the streets.
Now you are a big girl at last and streetfuls of people read your name
and a line of people shaped like a letter S stand at the box office hoping to see you shimmy.*

Grammy Award winning composer Libby Larsen was born in Wilmington, Delaware on December 24th, 1950. With a catalog of over 400 works, she has established herself as a staple in American classical music.

The Peculiar Case of Dr. H. H. Holmes was commissioned in 2009 by the Dickinson College for the Florestan Recital Project, Musical Artists in Residence. It received its premiere on March 5th, 2010 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with baritone Aaron Engebret and pianist Alison d'Amato. Ms. Larsen also provided the libretto for this piece, drawing on Holmes' autobiography, *Holmes' Own Story*, as well as various newspaper articles from the time, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The Peculiar Case of Dr. H. H. Holmes gives an autobiographical account of the man credited with being America's first serial killer; Dr. H. H. Holmes. A life-long criminal, this song cycle focuses primarily on the murders he committed at his "Murder Castle" during the Chicago World's Fair in the 1890's. Holmes' real name was Herman Webster Mudgett, and it is said that he renamed himself as a tribute to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character, Sherlock Holmes. H. H. Homes (aka Herman Mudgett) was born into a conservative, religious family in New Hampshire in 1861. A shy and easily frightened boy, Holmes was locked in the local doctor's office by a group of classmates around age eleven. Their attempt at traumatizing him backfired, however, and he became obsessed with the skeleton that was stored inside the office. Holmes began killing small animals and storing them in his bedroom. Despite this peculiar habit, he married and became a father at age 19.

This background history takes us to the life events that unfold during Larsen's composition. The song cycle is divided into five songs, with the only musical repetition occurring in the first and last songs, book-ending the entire, murderous experience.

The beginning of this cycle is unusual, as it begins *a cappella*; the vocalist begins without any musical introduction or accompaniment from the piano. Holmes reflects on the evidence found in a single room of his former home. The items- *a little spinning top and a tin man, a topcoat, a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending the seam, a woman's shoe, an ink bottle, and a handful of pearl dress buttons*- are all souvenirs of his victims. The piano enters, and Holmes addressed the audience directly, introducing himself as a gentleman of high society. He then re-lists the items found, and adds one more; bones.

I STATE MY CASE

*A room, unused since I ceased to reside there.
In it a stove that still bears the traces of fire.
a little spinning top and a tin man
a topcoat
a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending a seam
a woman's shoe
an ink bottle
a handful of pearl dress buttons
A gentleman – I am - the kind you want for a companion
A civic-minded man – the kind you want in your circle
A business man – the kind you want for your partner
Doctor, Pharmacist, Land development,
Glass bending, Gas refinery, Hotelier
HUMANUS INTELLIGENCIUS ARACHNOIDUS
My business – profit
My resources- people
ANIMA, ANIMUS, ANIMATO
My products
a little spinning top and a tin man
a topcoat
a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending a seam
a woman's shoe
an ink bottle
a handful of pearl dress buttons
... bones.*

In 1881, at the age of 20, Holmes is already estranged from his first wife. He decides to leave the east coast to attend medical school at the University of Michigan. Once there, he and a colleague devise a plan to commit insurance fraud by faking the death of his colleague with an already dead corpse and collecting the life insurance. Ultimately, it seems like too much work for Holmes, and he kills his colleague. H. H. Holmes, the murderous showman, is born.

AS A YOUNG MAN

September of my 20th year.

I study medicine in Ann Arbor – hundreds of miles from friends and relatives.

Wife and child in New York,

Sixty dollars in my pocket

Nine months of work ahead.

I need money – HUMANUS

And a plan - INTELLIGENCIUS

It is well known

That in the state of Michigan - if one studies medicine –

All the materials needed for dissection

Are supplied by the State.

The State needs materials – HUMANUS

For which they pay handsomely – ARGENTUS

I supply the materials with the help of my classmate – BUSINESS

We graduate, and find that doctoring is not PROFITUS

We devise a plan for doing BUSINESS

Fraud in the form of a little waltz -

..... a trusted friend, of modest means, already insured for life,

increases his policy to protect his child and wife.

Later on, the trusted friend begins to drink quite heavily

And kills his wife, and kills his child, and blames it on

insanity Some months later, a body is discovered, badly

decomposed With the body, is a letter, a suicide note.

A relative collects the money, we split it into three -

The relative, the trusted friend, my classmate and me.

We need three bodies - RIGOR MORTUS

Hidden in three cities - HIDE-US SEEK-US

The plan is too complicated

I kill my classmate instead

I use his insurance

To bide my time.

Holmes is now established in Chicago and has built what would later be known as the “Murder Castle;” an impressively large building, taking up an entire city block. It consisted of a pharmacy, private residence, and most importantly, an entire second floor full of empty rooms that would be rented out to businessmen and young women who had come to Chicago to work at the upcoming World’s Fair Expo. Holmes learns that he can make an income from selling dead bodies to medical schools and hospitals. At this time in history, it was not unusual to find dead bodies in the streets of Chicago, with an average of 1-2 people per day killed in construction and public transportation accidents. Holmes finds more joy in perfecting his craft of murdering unsuspecting tenants and business partners. This song ends with perhaps his most beneficial murder, that of Wade Warner, who sold Holmes the glass bending furnace that he would later use to dispose of the bodies he would kill.

I BUILD MY BUSINESS (A Polka)

It is well known that business done with men is straight on, clean and quickly settled.

Item: Dr. Russell, a tenant in my hotel. Rent due.

I struck him on the head with a heavy chair.

I sold his body – Forty-five dollars

Item: Mr. Rogers, an acquaintance from Virginia.

I took him fishing and struck him on the head with the oar.

Just practice.

Item: Charles Cole – A Southern Speculator.

The vicious blow crushed his head so badly that he was almost useless

To the party that bought him. Two thousand dollars.

Item: Robert Latimer, my janitor.

Discovering my business, he wanted money.

I locked him in the vault of my hotel and slowly starved him.

CORPUS GRATIS

Item: Benjamin Pitezal – My business partner. And his son.

After seven years of practice, I carried out my PLAN ORIGINALUS

INSURANCE FRAUDUS

Item: Wade Warner. I bought my glass bending furnace from him.

I paid a fortune for it.

Asking him to demonstrate the furnace, I locked him in it.

INCINEROUS...CORPUS INVISIBILUS

FORTUNE RETURNUS

BUSINESS EXPANDUS

After seven years of casual murdering as a means to make money, Holmes renovated parts of his castle, creating secret vaults and rooms to commit his crimes. In spite of his penchant for homicide, Holmes was very popular with young women and had several (illegal) wives and numerous mistresses during this period of his life. He methodically explains who each of the thirteen women on his victim list are, and the various ways he brought them to their deaths. His growing boredom leads him to be reckless, and ultimately three women he attempts to poison escape and run to the police.

THIRTEEN LADIES AND THREE WHO GOT AWAY (Grande Waltz Macabre)

It is well known that when you gain the confidence of women, you learn to juggle trust.

Introduction:

First you set the stage – I built my hotel

Then you set the method – secret vaults, secret rooms.

You employ young ladies: stenographers, cooks, waitresses, maids:

Waltz:

Lizzie, little Lizzie, a domestic in my hotel,

Quinlan, my partner, took a fancy to her

I called her, to my office, on the pretense of a raise.

I invited her to step into my vault to retrieve a cup and tray

I closed and locked the door – she cried

She pled me, to let her out – denied,

Unless she wrote a letter leaving Quinlan for good.

If she wrote the letter, then release her I would

She did. I killed her.

Thirteen ladies, there may have been more than

Thirteen ladies, I cannot say for sure.

Minnie and Nannie Williams, of wealthy estate

Required my protection, which I freely gave.

Minnie came to live with me of her own volition,

My visits to Nannie, ignited her suspicion.

Minnie murdered Nannie – Ah!

I disposed of Minnie – Ah!

Being their protector – Ah!

I was their estate's executor – Ah!

Thirteen ladies, there may have been more....

Sarah Cook, her unborn child and Mary Haracamp

A three-for-one they became.

*Julie Connor, her daughter Pearl
Came to me and never came away.
Nellie and Annie Peitzel, suffocated in a trunk
Anna Betts, Gertrude Conner, poisoned just for fun
Emmeline, my mistress, she broke my heart
I locked her in my vault and watched her slowly starve.
Thirteen ladies...
Thirteen ladies...
Three waitresses in my restaurant, I thought I could connive
To chloroform all three at once, of course to watch them die.
They escaped.
They ran to the authorities.
Suspicious were raised.
The end of my story.*

The final song in this theatrical cycle is the shortest. In it, Holmes states again the items from the first piece. After hearing his entire story, we then get to hear the additional items that he did not initially state; *a strand of hair caught on the stove pipe. - a jaw bone -seventeen teeth. Two human ribs, one partially consumed.* In the final sentence of the cycle, we are left with the cavalier musings of H. H. Holmes: *Bones... It's the bones that betray.*

EVIDENCE

*a little spinning top and a tin man
a topcoat
a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending a seam
a woman's shoe - charred on the instep of the sole
an ink bottle
a handful of pearl dress buttons
a bit of dress goods,
some fine hair caught in the stovepipe hole
jawbones – seventeen teeth
two human ribs, one partially consumed
..... bones
It's the bones that betray.*

Musically, Libby Larsen balances new sounds with the old. As mentioned above, the first and fifth songs are musically similar. They are not reflective of any other musical

style, but rather represent the inner-workings of H. H. Holmes' murderous mind. The piano plays in both the low and high extremes of the keyboard, and tends to react to, rather than support the vocal line. The second, third and fourth songs of the cycle are reminiscent of parlor music that you would hear in the late nineteenth century. II and IV are both waltzes, and III is noted in the score as, "Polka, A. Wallerstein, Jenny Lind's favorite Polka."

This song cycle includes the use of a prepared piano. "Prepared piano" in this case means that a variety of nuts and bolts (the kind found at the local hardware store) are placed meticulously between certain strings inside of the body of the piano, creating an especially eerie effect. Originally composed for baritone, we present this cycle as the first female duo, putting a feminist spin on this chilling piece of American history.

Trained as a percussionist, composer Carrie Magin has previously been associated with instrumental works. Recent commissions with the University of Cincinnati CCM Chorale and Georgia College Choral Ensemble have developed an interest in sung words. She is currently on composition faculty at Houghton College and the Interlochen Arts Academy. *Mnemosyne* appears in the New Music Shelf anthology for baritone.

According to Greek mythology, Mnemosyne was the mother of the nine muses, whom she gave birth to after Zeus stayed with her for nine consecutive days and nights (Britannica). She is also known as the "river of memory," and is said to know all things past, present and future. The Greeks believed that memory was the basis of creativity. Remembering the true order of things was to be rewarded, and so poets and kings in ancient Greece were thought to have a special relationship with the muses for their ability to recall the past.

Todd Hearon's sonnet, *Mnemosyne*, first appeared in a 2012 issue of the *Cincinnati Review* online publication and received its debut performance in 2017 at the Interlochen Arts Camp with baritone Ian Greenlaw and pianist Brianna Matzke.

Mnemosyne

*Take off my gown, let down my fiery hair,
Do with me what you've wanted, have your will.
Nothing will change though you possess me whole.
All you engender in me time will kill.
Time the assassin shadow at the door
That sniggered when you entered, time the sill
On which you set your watch, just now. The wall
You lean against, the ceiling and the floor.
Time is the house you're born in, and it's here
We'll burn to the bittersweetened end, my dear.
The rafters are lit already. See the fire
Lick at the sheets I lie inside. Don't fear,
The flames can't touch you, we've been through this before
Night after night. You know my name, remember?*

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CHAPTER III

The Murder Ballad

Jennifer Cresswell and Kathleen Kelly, *performers*
March 21st, 2021
Wolfe Center for the Arts, Bowling Green State University

Two Sisters

Traditional

Arranged by Jennifer Cresswell (b. 1981)
and Kathleen Kelly (b. 1963)

Caleb Meyer

Gillian Welch (b. 1967)

In the Pines

Traditional

Arranged by Cresswell and Kelly

INTERSTATE (world premiere)

Kamala Sankaram (b. 1978)

The Murder Ballad

Program Notes

Two sisters, one man, and a murder. That is the simple, yet effective, equation that has inspired 581 distinct ballads listed in the *Roud Folk Song Index*. While the meter and melody may vary, all of the songs tell some version of the following story:

The older sister is in love with a young man named Johnny. He, naturally, is in love with her younger sister and buys her gifts to show his affection. Under the guise of a sisterly nature walk along the rocky shores, the older sister pushes the younger into the water. In some variations, she drowns immediately, murdered by her own flesh and blood. In others, she is rescued by a miller, who robs her of her jewelry and then proceeds to kill her. Sometimes her body is turned into a musical instrument; her ribs carved into a harp or fiddle, strung with the strands of her blonde hair. In fantasy iterations, the music played on this instrument is so sad that it makes the elder sister's heart explode into pieces, killing her as punishment for her crime. More reality-based takes burn her alive at the stake.

The justification for murdering the young woman, either by the hands of her older sister or the miller, is never explained. "The Twa Sisters," the most commonly recognized title, was first recorded in 1806 by Scottish ballad collector Robert Jamieson. However, small bits of the story have been found on news clippings in picture form dating back to the 1400s, when "murder ballads" were commonly printed on single sheets with sketches and sold for cheap (Zarrelli). The first printed version in England dates to 1656, under the name "The Miller and the King's Daughter."

In his 1882 publication of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (a collection of 305 ballads commonly known as the “Child Ballads”), Francis James Child notes that “there are over 125 versions of “The Twa Sisters” in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian (Winick). One speculation as to why this is dates back to the crossing of cultures due to the 1266 Treaty of Perth between Scotland and Norway. If this is the case, the oral traditions of “The Twa Sisters” dates back even 200 years further than the first transcribed renditions.

The purpose of these three opening murder ballads is to dramatically set up the journey of the two performers on stage and to prepare the audience for *INTERSTATE*. Two sisters come from the same place. So too, do a singer and pianist, in that we are trained musicians who speak a common language. Why then are we looked at so differently when only the two of us are on stage? We begin this recital from a place of equality. Two performers beginning from the same starting point; two sisters, side by side.

The arrangement of *Two Sisters* is simple. The two performers sing unaccompanied, trading stanzas. It remains true to the strophic ballad structure and maintains a repeated refrain, “I’ll be true unto my love, if you’ll be true to me.” The question becomes to whom each sister is singing. The younger of the two, pleading with her older sister to take her hand and pull her from the icy waters as if to say, “I will forget all of this and continue to love you if you will just give me your hand.” The older sister, driven by jealousy and her unrequited love for Johnny, repeats the words of her younger sister, but sings them instead to the image of Johnny in her mind. “I’ll be true unto my love, if you’ll be true to me;” these words take on a chilling definition. It is from this starting point that the two performers, the two sisters of the recital stage, make their departure from each other and will spend the rest of the evening trying to find their way back together.

Two Sisters

*There were two sisters side by side
Sing aye-dum, sing aye-day
There were two sisters side by side
The boys are bound for me
There were two sisters side by side
The eldest for young Johnny cried
I'll be true unto my love
If you'll be true to me*

*Johnny bought the youngest a gay gold ring
Sing aye-dum, sing aye-day
Johnny bought the youngest a gay gold ring
The boys are bound for me
Johnny bought the youngest a gay gold ring
He never bought the eldest a single thing
I'll be true unto my love
If you'll be true to me.*

*Johnny bought the youngest a beaver hat
Sing aye-dum, sing aye-day
Johnny bought the youngest a beaver hat
The boys are bound for me
Johnny bought the youngest a beaver hat
The eldest didn't think much of that
I'll be true unto my love
If you'll be true to me.*

*As they were walkin' by the stony brim
Sing aye-dum, sing aye-day
As they were walkin' by the stony brim
The boys are bound for me
As they were walkin' by the stony brim
The eldest pushed the youngest in
I'll be true unto my love
If you'll be true to me.*

*Sister, oh Sister, give me your hand
Sing aye-dum, sing aye-day
Sister, oh Sister, give me your hand
The boys are bound for me
Sister, oh Sister, give me your hand
And you can have Johnny and all his land
I'll be true unto my love
If you'll be true to me.*

*Sister, I'll not give you my hand
Sing aye-dum, sing aye-day
Sister, I'll not give you my hand
The boys are bound for me
Sister, I'll not give you my hand
And I'll have Johnny and all his land
I'll be true unto my love
If you'll be true to me.*

The murder ballad became a part of American culture when the Scotch-Irish settled into the region known as Appalachia, bringing their traditions of sung storytelling with them (Zarrelli). Prior to the 20th century, murder ballads were centered around violent acts against women. The victims were most often young, helpless, and to be mourned. In 1998, Folk singer Gillian Welch decided to change that story. Implementing many of the qualities of traditional murder ballads (strophic form, a strict rhyme scheme, and repeated refrains), she wrote a song called *Caleb Meyer*. “Caleb Meyer lived alone in the hollerin’ pines, and he made a little whiskey for himself. Said it helped him pass the time.” The opening lines make the listener think

that this song is about a man named Caleb. However, the next lines break from traditional ballad format by changing to the first-person narrative. “Late one evening, in the back of my house, Caleb come around, and he called my name ‘til I came out with no one else around.” By this simple transition, Gillian Welch has given the power of the murder ballad back to women. This story unfolds from her point of view. We hear her cries to God as Caleb attempts to rape her. We also learn how she believes these prayers have been answered. The refrain in this murder ballad is a warning to Caleb Meyer’s ghost.

On stage, the two performers begin their musical language separation. The communication has changed from two voices to one voice and body percussion.

*Caleb Meyer, he lived alone
In them hollerin' pines
And he made a little whiskey for himself
Said it helped to pass the time
Long one evening in the back of my house
Caleb come around
And he called my name 'til I came out
With no one else around
Caleb Meyer, your ghost is gonna Wear
them rattlin' chains
But when I go to sleep at night
Don't you call my name.*

*Where's your husband, Nellie Kane
Where's your darlin' gone?
Did he go down off the mountain side And
leave you all alone?
Yes, my husband's gone to Bowlin' Green
To do some business there
Then Caleb threw that bottle down
And grabbed me by my hair
Caleb Meyer, your ghost is gonna Wear
them rattlin' chains
But when I go to sleep at night
Don't you call my name.*

*He threw me in the needle bed
Across my dress he lay
He held my hands above my head
And I commenced to pray
I cried My God, I am your child
Send your angels down
Then feelin' with my fingertips
The bottle neck I found
I drew that glass across his neck
As fine as any blade
And I felt his blood pour fast and hot
Around me where I laid*

*Caleb Meyer, your ghost is gonna Wear
them rattlin' chains
But when I go to sleep at night Don't
you call my name.*

American murder ballads were commonly recorded and arranged by mainstream folk and country musicians such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Dolly Parton through the 1960s and 70s. In November of 1993, just months before his death, 26-year-old *Nirvana* frontman Kurt Cobain took the opportunity of being featured on “MTV Unplugged” to introduce an entire generation of fans to one of his favorites. He delivered a chilling acoustic rendition of a song he called, “Where Did You Sleep Last Night,” giving credit to the 1944 recording by folk and blues musician Lead Belly as inspiration. Lead Belly (real name: Huddie William Ledbetter) recorded the song commercially at least six times before his death in 1949. His recordings of this song, which he would sometimes call, “Black Girl,” or “My Girl,” have been preserved and released by the Smithsonian Institution’s Smithsonian Folkways record label as part of a 5-CD boxed set (Weisbard). While all of the above titles are recognizable, across the more than 200 different commercial recordings by as many artists, this song is most commonly known as “In the Pines.”

In her 1970 dissertation, “In the Pines: The Melodic-Textual Identity of an American Lyric Folksong Cluster,” Judith McCulloh maps the history of “In the Pines,” also known in folk history as “The Longest Train I Ever Saw.” She was able to trace over 160 oral versions dating back to the 1870s, passed down through generations of families throughout southern Appalachia. The very first commercial recording was released in 1926 by Doc Walsh.

In this ballad, a train has come by and killed a man. “His head was found in a driving wheel, but his body was never found.” Beyond that, the many interpretations of “In the Pines” are full of mystery. To be “in the pines” is to be in trouble; to be in a place in your life where you wish you were not. “The pines” was also used to describe a part of town in rural

communities where activities looked down on by the community occurred; namely, gambling, drinking alcohol, and prostitution. “In the pines” can also be slang for a graveyard for the poor, named for the inexpensive pine coffins constructed for the bodies buried there.

Taking the many meanings into account, special consideration was given while arranging this ballad in selecting the lines of text to best serve the narrative of *INTERSTATE*. “My girl, my girl, where’d you sleep last night? Not even your mother knows,” ties directly into the text of *INTERSTATE*’s “Ohio Ballad,” where the trucker and Liv have an exchange: “Young girl, where’s your momma? I’m just looking for a ride.” The concept of being stuck “in the pines” is translated to a repeated line of *INTERSTATE*’s text; “all that dark on 75.”

The closing stanza of the ballad: “The best of friends to part sometimes, so why not you and I?” has set the stage. Singer and pianist have separated and are positioned at opposite ends of the piano. One has gone “in the pines” and will not come out alive.

*My girl, my girl, don't lie to me
Tell me where did you sleep last night?
In the pines, in the pines
Where the sun don't ever shine
I would shiver the whole night through*

*Her husband was a hard workin' man
'Bout a mile and a half from here
His head was found in a driving wheel
But his body never was found*

*My girl, my girl, where'd you sleep last night? Not
even your mother knows
I stayed in the pines,
where the sun never shines
Shivered where the cold winds blow.*

*You cause me to weep,
You cause me to moan
You cause me to leave my home
In the pines in the pines
Where the sun don't ever shine Shiver
where the cold winds blow.*

*My girl, my girl, don't lie to me
Tell me where did you sleep last night? In
the pines, in the pines
Where the sun never shines
I shivered the whole night through. The
best of friends to part sometimes And why
not you and I?
In the pines, in the pines
Where the sun never shines
I'm going where the cold winds blow*

INTERSTATE

In September of 2019, Kathleen Kelly and I opened the *Great Performances* concert series at the Toledo Art Museum with a recital built around female composers and poets. The anchors of the recital were Juliana Hall's cycle, *Through the Guarded Gate*, with text by Margaret Widdemer, and Libby Larsen's *The Peculiar Case of Dr. H. H. Holmes*. Larsen's cycle was written for baritone and was a biographical account of the murders committed by Holmes in 1890s Chicago, sung in the first person. We were the first, and remain the only, female duo to perform the work. In the hours just after a successful dress rehearsal for the recital, a series of text messages would shape the course of our work together for the following 18 months.

Having met in 2015 and worked together since 2016, we had already collaborated on Thomas Pasatieri's chamber opera, *Before Breakfast*, Laura Kaminsky's *As One*, and on various concerts in the Ann Arbor area. Having found our footing as a duo rooted in American Music with feminist themes, we decided it was time to commission a piece that best showcased what we have to offer as complete artists. Playing a serial killer in Larsen's cycle proved rewarding in a way that differed from playing the damsel in distress or the jilted lover (the archetypes of so many operatic roles written for women of my voice type). What would it be like to portray a woman who had committed such heinous acts?

We were immediately drawn to the story of Aileen Wuornos. A life-long trafficked person and prostitute, Aileen Wuornos confessed to murdering eight men in 1989-90. She was sentenced to the death penalty in 1992 and was executed in the state of Florida in 2002. Born in 1956 in Troy, Michigan, Aileen's childhood was one full of abuse and mental illness. Abandoned

by her mother and raised in an abusive home with alcoholic grandparents, Aileen was a victim of sexual assault and rape many times over at the hands of both teenage boys and adult men by the time she was twelve years old. Having given birth by the age of fourteen, she spent a year sleeping outside in the woods behind her neighborhood before convincing a friend to drive her over the state line to Toledo, Ohio, where she planned to hitchhike her way down to warmer weather and a new life.

There were many times in Aileen's life where society should have stepped in to protect her. As an eleven-year-old child, high school students had given her the name, "Cig Pig," because they would engage in sexual acts with her in exchange for giving her cigarettes or cans of beer, which she would then share in an effort to gain friendship (Wuornos, 4). The school counselors knew she was homeless as a freshman in high school, yet no one stepped in. She had just turned sixteen years old when she hitchhiked down the interstate, and multiple men gave her rides in exchange for raping her. After over a decade of being a child sex trafficking victim and then a prostitute once she reached legal age, Aileen attempted to take her own life. In 1979 she waded out into the Atlantic Ocean and shot herself in the stomach. Miraculously, she was found and taken to the emergency room. Disregarding her as human trash, the gunshot wound was treated and she was immediately released, without so much as a psychological evaluation.

By the time Aileen killed her first victim, Richard Mallory, in 1989, she had been a victim of sexual abuse and violence for over twenty years. She maintained in the trial that Mallory had attempted to rape her. She cried on the stand while she recounted the events of the evening and was forced to describe in detail the graphic specifics involving each act. She was upfront about her work as a prostitute. Her public defender never introduced into evidence the fact that Richard Mallory had a violent past and had already served ten years for sexual assault. A woman with a horrific childhood, who had endured decades of sexual abuse and had confessed to

murdering seven men in the span of eighteen months was never given a psychological examination to determine if she was sane enough to stand trial. Aileen was found guilty and sentenced to death. She became a media sensation and was constantly bombarded with interview requests and also people looking to take personal advantage of her new-found fame. One woman, Arlene Pralle, legally adopted Aileen for several years (thereby becoming the financial executor of all of the money she was being paid for interviews).

From prison, Aileen released her own autobiography, *Monster: My True Story*, which she co-wrote with Christopher Berry-Dee. Soon after her incarceration began and with her blessing, filmmaker Nick Broomfield created a documentary, *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*. In 2003, after her execution, he would release his follow-up documentary, *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*. 60 Minutes filmed an entire episode on her. Daytime talk show host Geraldo Rivera interviewed her from prison via satellite. Although the movie *Monster*, which earned Charlize Theron an academy award for her portrayal of Wuornos, didn't debut until two years after her execution, Aileen was well aware that the Hollywood blockbuster was in the works at the time of her death.

There has been much coverage of Aileen's crimes, her volatile love affair with Tyria Moor, and the trials that would ultimately lead to her execution. What has not been given as much attention is the friendship between Aileen Wuornos and Dawn Botkins. After Aileen's arrest and first conviction made national headlines, her estranged and only childhood friend reached out to her by sending a letter in the mail. The two women corresponded for over ten years until Aileen's execution in 2002. Dawn saved all of the letters that Aileen wrote to her, and in 2012, an edited collection entitled, *Dear Dawn: Aileen Wuornos in her Own Words* was released. The letters are touching, painful, and even humorous. This was a story of two women

who began on a similar path, and at one point, separated and lost track of each other. Was it all circumstance, or were intentional choices to create distance made? Would the women, now reunited, be able to find common ground? This was a story made of bones that many of us are familiar with. This was the inspiration and departure point for *INTERSTATE*.

While a great deal of research went into the story of Aileen Wuornos and Dawn Botkins, it was important that a variety of people of all body types and ethnicities be able to play either of the parts in this work. While actual events influenced the storyline, this work is not meant to be a biographical recount of these two specific women. The characters of *INTERSTATE* are named Olivia and Diane (Liv and Di).

We wanted to create not just a new work, but a new type of work. We wanted to push the boundaries and smash the traditional box of the singer/pianist recital relationship. Why is it called the singer's recital when there are two people on stage offering music in tandem? Why do we instruct the audience to direct their collective gaze on the performer in the fake lashes and flashy gown? Why does one artist follow the other on stage and wait to be acknowledged after the initial accolades have been received? Knowing the intricate work process that goes into recital preparation; the detailing, the finesse, and ultimately the hour of music making where the two artists do not just perform their individual parts at the same time, but respond to each other in real time, reacting and breathing together, the tradition of the prima donna and her accompanist needs to be broken and rebuilt in a way that exudes equity and true partnership.

While one performer's instrument is inside of their body and the other's is a keyboard, what would it be like if we gave both performers text? How would the communication between performers change? With a shared library of over a dozen original texts and adaptations, we agreed to co-write the text for *INTERSTATE*. The part of the flashy serial killer on death row would be written for soprano, The part of the midwestern housewife, trapped in the confines of

her own life, would be written for speaking pianist; the pianist would hold equal dramatic weight in this chamber work.

Given the sensitive and women-centered theme, it was important to find the right composer to bring this idea to life. Kamala Sankaram is one of the country's most prominent and compelling composers of new vocal works. She uses her unique voice to tell stories of modern society, with special interest in the stories of contemporary women. Her recent work at National Sawdust, *Looking at You*, received widespread acclaim; in works like *Thumbprint* and *Taking up Serpents*, she has explored topics such as rape and religious patriarchy. She has received commissions from Washington National Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Beth Morrison Projects, the PROTOTYPE Festival, Opera on Tap, Opera Memphis, and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and is currently on the composition faculty at SUNY Purchase.

I reached out to Kamala Sankaram via her website and pitched the project to her. To my utter surprise, she responded the next morning, we exchanged phone numbers, and by twelve o'clock noon she was on board and we had a verbal agreement. Commissioning a substantial piece of music is an expensive endeavor. Through Rackham Graduate School, the School of Music, Theatre & Dance Eileen Weiser EXCEL Fund, the Center for the Education of Women, and a handful of private donors, over \$16,000 was raised for the creation of *INTERSTATE*.

This recital is the world premiere of *INTERSTATE*. It is presented without costumes, props or staging. *INTERSTATE* intentionally defies classical genre. Like many art songs and ballads, it tells a story and vacillates between real-time and flashback events. The characters are named and communicate with each other through dialogue, much like an opera. However, the same can all be said for Schubert's *Erlkönig*, with the only difference being that it is the pianist performing the text of the other characters, and not the singer who must perform both. The piano

and the performer playing it are on stage, as in a traditional recital. It is not, however, a part of the theatrical scenery. By this set of rules, it is a concert work.

INTERSTATE will continue to evolve. This performance is generously hosted by Bowling Green State University and WGTE Public Media as part of their “Living American Composers: New Music from Bowling Green” syndicated radio program, which is carried by over 200 radio stations world-wide. *INTERSTATE* was also selected as a semi-finalist by West Edge Opera in San Francisco to be a part of its inaugural Aperture program for new works. The process of its creation in relationship to creating new works that pass the Bechdel Test has been presented at the National Opera Association and been featured in the online journal, *The Middle Class Artist*. Keep the Music Going Productions, a company that specializes in creating movie-versions of chamber operas and theatrical music works and has filmed for the Dallas Opera, Atlanta Opera, Houston Grand Opera and Minnesota Opera has picked it up and will be producing it in July of 2021. Although the COVID-19 pandemic delayed other live performance plans of the piece, it is the intention to take *INTERSTATE* on a recital tour, stopping in cities along the route hitchhiked down I-75, and partnering with organizations that rehabilitate trafficked women.

Whether in opera or concert form, women’s voices in classical music have often been determined and silenced by the behaviors of the male characters with whom they share the stage. Only 20% of the top fifty operas performed in the United States between 2010 – 2019 pass the Bechdel test. The Bechdel test was developed by Alison Bechdel in a 1985 comic titled, “The Rule.” The two characters in the strip were discussing movies and posed a “test” of three questions.

Question one: Are there two women in the movie with actual names?

Question two: Do they talk to each other?

Question three: Do they have a conversation about something other than a man?

Although on the surface, the story of *INTERSTATE* is about a prostitute guilty of murdering the clients who picked her up, it was important that the text itself pass the Bechdel test and the focus not be on the men Olivia killed. It was also important that Olivia's identity as a trafficked person not be glamorized or sweetened in the same way as two of the operatic canon's most popular soprano roles.

Alphonsine Plessis, the real-life inspiration for opera's beloved Violetta Valery in *La Traviata* was sold by her father to a man when she was eleven years old. The 19th century opera also doesn't tell you about the devastating financial slavery that impacted the lives of the women of the Parisian demimonde (Kelly). Instead, Giuseppe Verdi wrote a famous aria about freedom. The audience is touched by the prostitute with a heart of gold, and after mourning her death, leaves the theater whistling "Sempre Libera."

Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* is also sexually trafficked in her teens. It's an explicit part of the libretto, but the focus of the first act is a gorgeous love duet about the tenor overcoming this teenage character's fears of her first sexual experience.

These two stories are consistently in the top five most produced operas worldwide. The music is beautiful and heartbreaking in both of these operas, but they also leave out enormous parts of a real story, human trafficking, that impacts women worldwide. The distance in time between contemporary audiences and the victims in *Madama Butterfly* and *La Traviata* allows the audience to separate themselves far enough away from the characters to not truly accept the horrific circumstances of their lives.

Creating a text inspired by a woman whose life was a series of escalating traumas while preserving her dignity was a main focus for *INTERSTATE*. So too, was creating a performance piece that would hold the audience accountable and leave them in questioning self-reflection at the choices they've made and the people they have distanced themselves from along the way.

After six months of research and streamlining the story that we wanted to tell, the text of *INTERSTATE* was drafted in June of 2020. After two virtual invited readings of the text and feedback from trusted colleagues, we turned the text of *INTERSTATE* over to Kamala Sankaram, who described it as a "tragic love story."

INTERSTATE is scored for soprano and speaking pianist. With a run time of approximately 45 minutes, it can be broken down into eight distinct musical sections:

1. Opening
2. Goddamn Queen
3. Ohio Ballad
4. Florida Ballad
5. I Heard About Your Baby...
6. Mankiller Liv
7. Happy Birthday, Diane
8. Home

These eight sections are connected by recitative-style bridges in what the composer calls "contemporary chant notation." The pitches are notated for the singer, but the rhythms are not, and are left up to the individual artist performing them. The contemporary chant is intended to be sung as close to natural speech as possible.

Figure 4. Contemporary chant example

In both the first and last sections of the piece (“Opening” and “Home”), the two performers share equal vocal weight. The pianist, as Diane, speaks as much as the soprano, Olivia, sings. These are the two bookends of the score where the two performers are trying to connect on the same level and in the same way. Of the six remaining sections, three are contemporary American murder ballads (“Ohio Ballad,” “Florida Ballad,” and “Mankiller Liv”), two are arias for the soprano voice (“Goddamn Queen,” and “Happy Birthday, Diane,”), and one is an aria for the speaking pianist (“I Heard About Your Baby”).

In addition to the three contemporary ballads, INTERSTATE contains the diegetic inclusion of a traditional murder ball dating back to the 1860s; “Banks of the Ohio.” It is a joyous memory shared between the two women as they reminisce about eighth grade. The piano part is simplified in a way that suggest the piano skills of a middle-schooler. The two performers sing in unison:

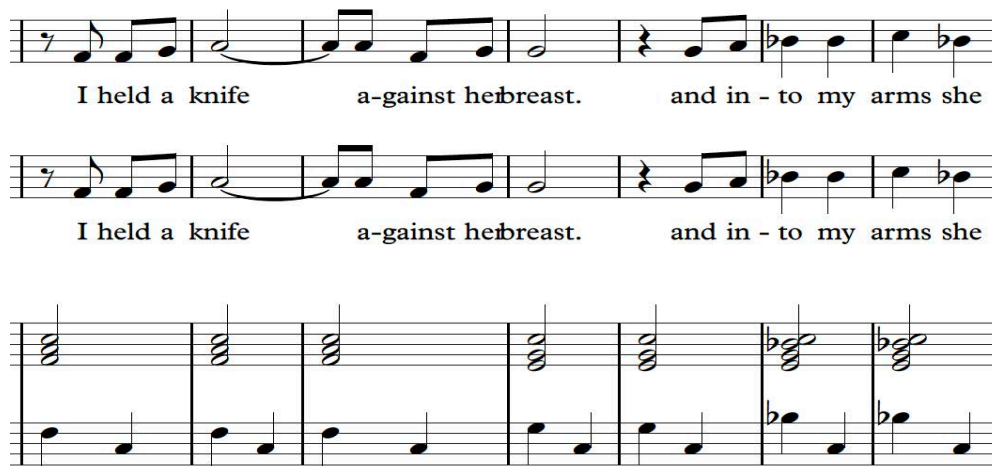


Figure 5. Unison singing of "Banks of the Ohio."

Creating a dialogue score that requires one of the performers to remain seated at a piano called for a creative strategy. With the primary basis of dramatic communication between the two characters being epistolary, Kamala Sankaram was inspired to create a

is spelled out repetitively over Liv's soprano line. This theme will continue until the end of the work, when it morphs into "Liv, please."

Musical score for "Home". The top staff shows a vocal line with lyrics: "An-y-way, Press it to the". The bottom staff shows piano accompaniment with the word "HOME" written in large letters across two measures. The piano part features a repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 8. "Home"

Musical score for "Liv Please". The top staff shows a vocal line with lyrics: "i - o. i - o. Liv. Sound Cue 5: News reports". The bottom staff shows piano accompaniment with the words "L I V P L E A S E" written in large letters across two measures. The piano part features a repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 9. "Liv Please"

The piano line in the score transitions between creating the story as a typing tool for Diane and offering musical support/accompaniment to Liv's ballads and arias. When the pianist speaks, it is metered and largely without notated pitch. This is in direct opposition to the singer's musical lines, where in scripted interactions with the pianist, the pitches are notated, but not rhythmic meter exists. This is part of the emotional wall between the two characters, who are desperately trying to connect. An example of the two different styles of delivery within the same line of music:

Musical score for pianist and singer dialogue example. The score is for measures 178-180. It features three staves: LIV (soprano), DI (piano), and Pno. (piano). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 100. The lyrics are: LIV: "You know what I remember about that trip? The snacks!"; DI: "What a bad mis-take. God, yes! Snacks!"; Pno.: "What a bad mis-take. God, yes! Snacks!".

Figure 10. Pianist and singer dialogue example

For a pianist to have equal dramatic weight in a theatrical song cycle, space was created for metered monologues. The very beginning of the piece consists of several pages of spoken text for the pianist to allow the audience's ear to adjust to this soundscape. When the singer's vocal line enters for the first time in measure 52, it is in rhythmic unison with the pianist's speech. This highlights the differences between the two communication styles. It also makes use of the fact that one character is reading the letter that the other has written:

The musical score for Figure 11 consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'LIV', is a soprano line with lyrics 'I wonder if you'll get this. I'. The middle staff, labeled 'DI', is a piano line with lyrics 'You don't have to write back. I wonder if you'll get this.' and features a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff, labeled 'Pno.', is a piano accompaniment with a complex rhythmic and harmonic structure in both hands.

Figure 11. "I wonder if you'll get this"

The largest metered monologue of the piece occurs after a conflict between the two characters. Diane is faced with recounting the events of a particular evening that was a turning point in the friendship. The spotlight is temporarily removed from the spectacle of the loud, charismatic serial killer with the soaring vocal lines. It is the pianist's character, Diane, who holds the most dramatic tension for the audience. In these four minutes of the fifth section of the piece, "I Heard About Your Baby," the audience is invited to see themselves and question their own actions and judgments about the outcasts in society.

Though written in a more traditional style, the use of meter in the vocal line for the soprano in *INTERSTATE* is also dramatically intentional. The use of contemporary chant and

improvisational rhythm is limited to the real-time interactions between the two characters. Within the vocal ballads and arias, meter is used to define Olivia's mental state. She suffers with borderline personality disorder, characterized by extreme emotional outbursts and fragmented communication. When she is attempting to be charming or show emotional attachment, it is uneven and imperfect. This is reflected with the implementation of the uneven meters of 5/8 and 7/8. Even in the most vulnerable point of the piece, "Happy Birthday, Diane," the broken Olivia cannot maintain an even 4/4 meter and the time signature intermittently changes to 5/8. In opposition to that, when Olivia is recounting violent and traumatic events ("Ohio Ballad" and "Mankiller Liv"), the tempo maintains steady simplicity. This is a space where Olivia lives and is her natural state.

INTERSTATE weaves a complex musical tapestry of simple melodies, thorny harmonies, metered speech, un-metered pitches, no formal key signatures, and creates a cohesive soundscape of 21st century American music. This is a tragic love story of two characters who speak with the same linguistic tools but ultimately fail to communicate.

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CHAPTER IV

INTERSTATE - The Book

DIANE - low/middle income housewife. Pianist/speaking role

OLIVIA - on death row for multiple murders. Singing role.

(sounds, speech, hard to decipher. Media reports? Over this DIANE's voice begins to emerge, uncertain, curious)

Diane: *(brightly)* I bet you're surprised, hearing from me.

No.

(switching tones, more matter-of-fact)

I hope it's OK for me to write.

How long has it been? Since dad's funeral, I guess.

After that I lost track. Such a long time.

So when everything...on the TV...

It was a surprise.

No. I mean...

(Another attempt - old familiarity)

Girl, now you're famous!

Jesus. No. Anyway.

One day, there you were, all over the TV. That's how I found out. So.

I hope it's OK. You don't have to write back.

(lights have come up on OLIVIA; the two women's lines begin to intersect, join, disconnect. Olivia's voice emerges, jaded, suspicious.)

Olivia and Diane: You don't have to write back.
I wonder if you'll get this.
I still think of all those nights down at the Pits.
We were kids together, down there at the edge.
Do you remember?

Diane: Girl, you're famous. You always did go big.

Olivia: Writing after all this time.
I suppose you want in on the story.
The whole gory mess? The glory? You might just have to get in line.

Diane: Liv, we were kids together, down at the edge.
Do you remember?

Olivia: Sure I remember. The edge of the quarry.

Diane: Down at the edge. We were kids.
I can still smell it.

Olivia: I can still smell it.

Diane: Diesel fumes. Garbage.

Olivia: Smoky leaves. Sweat.
Shadows. Headlights.
Down at the Pits.

Diane: We were just kids.

Olivia: Maybe you were a kid.
I was the goddamn queen.

Diane: No doubt, Liv, no doubt.

Olivia: I'm sure you remember.
Why else would you write?
You remember Jimmy?
Big game, all that high school shit.
Each night before was down there with me.
Remember the rocks where it's too dark to see?

Don't forget our bad boy Ted.
Stealing beer from Daddy's corner station.
We'd throw the cans just to hear them crash
Down at the bottom where it's too dark to see.
Is it just like you remember?
How old were we, well, let's see-

Who was that tall kid? Andy? Anthony?
Country club asshole.
Cold shoulder at school,
But he knew the back way,
If you know what I mean.
For him it could never be too dark to see.

Olivia and Diane:

I was (you were) the goddamn queen
Just like you remember,
The goddamn queen!
God, what a time!
Just like you/I remember.

Olivia: That was before, so...
I must have been...
(sucking the air out of the room with purpose)
Twelve.
Shit!

Diane: Shit, we were twelve.

Olivia: Before pop kicked me out.

Diane: (dully) Before...

Olivia: Puttin' the Mitten in the rear view.

Diane: Baby's big adventure.

Olivia: All for beer and cigs. And for fun.
Why not?
You had fun too, Di.

Diane: I had...
it wasn't a fair deal. Nobody looked out for you.

Olivia: My grandma did.

Diane: Things sure would have been different if she had lived. She always kept you safe.

Olivia: Safe. Right. never any safe with Pop.

Diane: Kids used to say, "Don't look him in the eye." We all steered clear of your yard. But Jesus, Liv, I never knew until that drive. You should have told someone sooner.

Olivia: You're no Nancy Drew. My black eye told a good story.

Diane: How is that a clue? You weren't the only one getting knocked around. No, I mean the rest of it. I didn't know. Not until Toledo.

Olivia: Mitten in the rear view. You helped me get away.

Diane: Baby's big adventure. Baby's big mistake.

Olivia: You know what I remember about that trip? The snacks!

Diane: God, yes! Snacks!

Olivia: We crammed enough food into your backpack to last a week! That 7-11 never knew what hit it. Andy Capp's Cheddar Fries. All that dark on 75...

Diane: That terrifying truck stop.

Olivia: I walked right up to that driver.

Diane: Hands in your back pockets, cold as steel. Your stance said, "Watch this, Diane." Already so tough.

Olivia: Tough girl Liv.

Diane: Were you afraid? Were you ever afraid?

Olivia: The first night in Toledo -
Dark road calling me.
Which way? How long? How far?
Past where I can see.
Shadows in the headlights,
Coffee served inside.
Young girl, where's your momma?
I'm just looking for a ride.
A faded musty blanket.
A bottle 'neath the seat.
The yellow lines repeating.
The radio. The heat.
He says we're pulling off,
Just a chance to rest his eyes.
His left hand reaches for the lock,
His right hand for my thighs.
The yellow lines repeating,
I've been down this road before.
I close my eyes and free my mind,
Not trembling anymore.

Actually, he was not the worst. He bought us breakfast in Cincinnati. I had pancakes and bacon. God, I love those little packets of syrup.

Diane: Cincinnati. "On the Banks of the Ohio!"

Olivia: oh my God! Your sister's cheesy album! You always loved that hippy shit!

Diane: Eighth grade, right? Sanderson's history class. That's where we learned about the Underground Railroad. We wrote that paper on the Ohio River!

Olivia: The Ohio River. Damn! Ever seen it for real? A whole ton of old bridges over it. Like, a thousand ways across.

Diane: Only you were going in the wrong direction. I wish I had taken you back up 75...

Olivia: Where life was a picnic, right? Come on, Di. You did me a favor. I'd seen a lot worse than Mr. Pancakes and Bacon.

Diane: Pancakes and bacon. (*sings*) "Only say that you'll be mine

In no other arms entwine.
Down beside where the waters flow,
Down by the banks of the Ohio”

(Olivia joins)

“I held a knife against her breast,
And into my arms she pressed,
She cried, "Oh Willie, don't murder me
I'm not prepared for eternity.”

Olivia: You covered my ass with that history project. You covered my ass a lot, Di. Remember how I used to shower at your house?

Diane: Tuesdays and Thursdays, when Mom worked late. She was always pissed about the wet towels. She never did figure it out.

Olivia: I was sleeping in the woods behind the school. You made us dinner while I dried my hair.

Diane: God, I remember. Hamburger Helper, Kraft Mac and Cheese! Tuesdays and Thursdays living like queens.

Olivia: Like goddamn queens!

Diane: Like criminals.

Olivia: Like Christmas.

(the ballad resumes)

Sunrise bright and early,
I sneak in all alone.
Rinsing in the girls' room
Before my cover's blown.
Waking up in classes,
Unsympathetic glares,
I'm just another bad girl
Who you meet under the stairs.
So maybe for a cigarette,
A warm bed or a beer,
I do the thing that keeps me safe
Till I get out of here.

Diane: Big brave ideas about freedom. We were stupid kids playing pirates. You, out there on the road all alone..

Olivia: Hey, we did our best, right?
And Florida was like winning the lottery.
Best part was,
Nobody knew me.
I got a job assembling microwaves,
If you can believe that!
Hardest work I ever did in my life.
In a way, got me ready for prison;
On my feet twelve hours a day,
Telling me when I can smoke a damn cigarette,
You can't make a life workin' the line,
Except the kind you're too exhausted to live.

Diane: So... is that why?

Olivia: Huh. I saw the girls at the docks come sundown,
Fishnets and high heels in a sequined line.
Bunch of sluts. Not my style.
When I settled back into it, nobody knew.
"Mister, can you help me?
I need a lift to get to town.
I was fired from the factory
And my luck's been kinda down.
If I make it to my sister's
Maybe she will take me in,"
The door unlocks, I hop inside,
We let the games begin.

Diane: When you came back for dad's funeral, you didn't say a word.

Olivia: "Mister, can you help me?
I'm short sixty dollars
Til my lights are turned back on.
That's just the basic service
Plus the extras we'll tack on."
Act just like a girlfriend, keep it natural.
And if he bails, keep his wallet as collateral.

Diane: Sounds like you had it all worked out.

Olivia: There were times things didn't work out.
But hey, life throws a lot of shit at you,
It hurts a lot less when it comes from strangers.

Diane: Ouch.

Olivia: Out Tuesday, back Thursday
Shooting pool at happy hour with my crowd.
Tuesdays and Thursdays.
Living like a goddamn queen in a kingdom where nobody knew.

Diane: You could have let people know, you could have come home. Me and Randy, we could have helped you out.

Olivia: You and Randy? Wow. Ok.

Diane: You know we would have been there for you. Randy is a good man.

Olivia: A good man. How nice for you. Guess you've had all the luck.

Diane: You think it's luck? Good things don't just happen. Liv, you have to make them work. Why didn't you say something at Dad's funeral? We weren't kids then. We could talk to each other like adults.

Olivia: That time we got stranded after that concert in Detroit. Oh, wait a second. We were kids then, so I guess that doesn't count. Waiting on that corner for fucking ever before he drove up. A good man. He unlocks your door, but he's staring at me. Says, "Sorry, no trash allowed in my car."

Olivia and Diane: Your eyes met mine for just a second.

Diane: I watched you turn. I watched you walk right up to that van. Hands in your back pockets, cold as steel. Your stance said, "Fuck you, Diane." I didn't say a word. I got into the car. We drove away. I heard about your baby. Everybody placing bets on who the father was.

Olivia: Is this talking to each other like adults, or would that be having the balls to ask me what happened? Did you even want to know?

Diane: You were so goddamn scary, Liv! I was afraid of you!

Olivia: Bullshit!

Diane: Okay then. I was embarrassed. You embarrassed me. No. You were my friends, but I... Six years after that concert, I had my little Michigan family. The diapers, the factory job, the trips to Frankenmuth, everything like it's supposed to be. Like, I made it out, Liv. I made it out. Do you understand? We were fifteen years old, and you couldn't go home, and everybody knew why. I knew why. Liv, I knew.

Olivia: Diane, What gives?
I haven't heard from you in weeks.
I guess that's it?
Maybe you're just busy with
Your husband, kids, and house, and car.
Is it the same car, I wonder?
I bet Randy changes his own oil.
Lucky lady, Lady Di.
Each nice day like the nice one before.

Diane: You're in the papers again. Every morning, there's news about your last appeal. That picture of you standing at the table. Big, wide, insane smile. Doesn't look like you.

Olivia: Dear Di,
Do I ever feel like an idiot!
They dropped a whole sack of mail at my cell today.
They opened every single piece first.
Hey, maybe they're poisoned.
After all this, death by mail!

Diane: They never found the gun you said that one guy had.
You always did have a story, Liv. You always did have a pose.

Olivia: When my time comes,
It'll be way more exciting, all strapped down in blue,
That's a ways off, too.
Tina's up ahead of me-
Killed her husband after 37 years.
Guess she had enough, right?
Only thing harder than a hooker proving rape
Is believing that story from a wife.

Diane: A wife. A child. A family. I look at Randy and imagine your gun.

Olivia: I've got another eight months,
Maybe a year. Who knows, right?
Hey, maybe you can come down.
I get to choose my dinner the night before.
We can have anything you want,
My treat!

Diane: I know you never caught a break,
But you're inviting me to the last goddamn supper
And those men are dead. Life is hard for lots of people who don't take other lives.

Olivia: Gold-hearted Di
And her pal Liv, the skank !
I can just see the look on your face.
You're so surprised, right?
I had to hear it all the time:
"Lucky you, she's such a good friend."
Well fuck you, Di,
Why'd you write to me, anyway?
Do you want me to say everything's okay,
There was nothing you could have done?
Am I supposed to be grateful for your kind gesture?
Get on my knees like a good girl?

Diane: Stop it. Okay, I felt guilty.
Yes, okay, you're right that I'm lucky.
I wanted to remember the way we used to be.
But this stranger in the spotlight?
Flipping off the cameras
And smiling nice and wide?
I don't recognize this crazy mankiller!

Olivia: Now THAT is a title if I've ever heard one!
Forget the old tale of the gold-hearted whore-
I'm notorious Mankiller Liv!
Oh gather round children, I'll tell you the tale Of notorious Mankiller Liv.
They say she was fiercer than old Genghis Khan,
And she had zero fucks left to give.
An innocent man on the highway at night
Sees a damsel alone and distressed.

He stops to assist her, she's grateful it seems,
And so he admits her as guest.
"Oh how can I pay you, kind sir," she inquires,
While languidly parting her thighs.
Like that she's bewitched him, our man's in a daze,
No choice but to claim her as prize.

That's the song everybody knows, right?
The Song of She Deserved It.
The Song of Why'd You Get In.
The Song of This is What You Wanted.

Diane: (*simultaneous*) Did you deserve it? Why didn't Randy let you in? Girl, you're famous.
Is this what you wanted?

Olivia: That's my song! You play my song! Everybody sing!

He's bested by passion, knows not what he does,
She's made him so crazy, you see.
So what if he hits her a little too hard,
She should have expected to bleed.
But what he doesn't know is that there's nothing left,
No blood and no feeling inside.
His hands on her neck have no kind of effect,
You can't kill a person who's died.
He can't know she carries a gun in her purse,
He can't know, as he takes his last breath,
He's birthed the notorious Mankiller Liv!

And we love them both more,
We all love them much more -
Yes, everyone loves them in death.
But I'm the murderer, right? Me and not him?

Diane: You're the murderer because he's dead, and you're not.

Olivia: So I'd better pay, right?
I'll pay with my body.
THAT I know how to do.

Rinsing in the truck stop john
Before my cover's blown,
I did the things that kept me safe,
I did them all alone.

Diane: Liv. Jesus. Liv.
We were just kids. In the Pits. In the dark.
Where no one could see.

HOME

Olivia: Happy Birthday, Diane!
Here's a picture I've been working on for quite awhile.
Thought maybe I'd have it done by Christmas for ya,
But I wanted to make sure it was just right.
Hope you got this before the big day.
A bald eagle swooping down over the mountains.
When all is said and done, I still love this country.
And God knows I wish I could fly away-
Maybe when I die
I can hitch a ride,
A bald eagle to fly me right up to the mountains!
Tina said in Colorado.
The air's so clean your nose will bleed!
Nothing like Michigan. Not like home.
Anyway,
Press it to the light.
Tape this eagle to the window,
By mid-afternoon it'll look like the wings are
Stained glass.
A cheap blue pen does just fine
If you're willing to take your time.
Maybe the big day's already passed, but...that's okay.
Just... Happy birthday, Diane,
And thanks for taking the time.

Diane: Dear Liv,
It's hard to know what to say
Counting down to the big day

I'll be there in the next room, I promise.

I'll be there to take the cremains.

But after, Liv, I want to know -

Will you let me bring you home?

Olivia: Home?

Diane: Yes. Home. Please.

Olivia: Back to the Pit,
Where I was the goddamn queen...

Diane: Back where we should have kept you safe, Where
you should have wanted to be.

Olivia: The Mitten must stay in the rear view.
Bring me out to some beautiful beach.
Send me flying in the sunset breeze.

Diane: You'll never rest where you did what you did. Let's
take that drive back up I-75.

Olivia: All that dark on 75...
Back to the edge, where no one can see?

Diane: No. Back where you deserved a home,
Under a quiet tree.
You'll rest in shade.
No reason again to be afraid.
This time let me stay by you.
Say you'll rest with me.

Olivia: "I asked my love to take a walk,
Just a little walk,
Down beside where the waters flow,
Down by the banks of the Ohio..."

Olivia and Diane: "And only say that you'll be mine
In no others arms entwined
Down beside where the waters flow,
Down by the banks of the Ohio"

Diane: Liv. Please?