THROUGH THE EARS OF LIBBY LARSEN: WOMEN, FEMINISM AND SONG IN AMERICA

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Historical women composers have confronted various problems and issues associated with the gendered category of "women composers" or the identity of being a woman composer. Historical women composers have approached these various problems and issues in relation to the implied designation of "composer" as a masculine endeavor. A central thread of this study concerns the history of feminism in America and how its various "waves" or stages of feminist political activity have played a role in women's musical composition in this country. Taking composer Libby Larsen as a modern example, I address her experiences in relation to concerns of the second wave of feminism and consider two of her song cycles in connection with her practices of song writing: *Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey, 1880-1902* and *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII.*

Organized in three general parts and nine chapters, this study presents historical background, a personal interview with Libby Larsen, and specifics about her music through a discussion of two song cycles. The first chapter develops ideas central to the question of "the woman composer" and organizations that arose to promote the work of female composers.

The second chapter provides a basic description of the various feminist waves that happened in America. This chapter places particular focus on gender roles, expectations and concepts of inequality. Chapter 3 takes this discussion of gender expectations and places it in reference to the work and experiences of female composers. Addressing the "female composer's problem," requires exploring the various roadblocks experienced by women through American musical history, as well as their ties to feminist ideas. A

discussion of Amy Beach serves as a case study of an American female composer's experience as related to gender expectations, roles and identity.

Chapter 4 considers experiences of other female composers in light of a discussion of three prominent American composers: Mabel Daniels, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon. Each conversation about these composers (including that of Amy Beach in Chapter 3) examines the use of the term "woman composer" along with each woman's personal view of the term.

The second part of the document, including Chapters 5 and 6, outline the details of my personal interview with Libby Larsen, which took place in St. Paul Minnesota at the composer's residence on April 27, 2011. Chapter 5 examines the composer's musical experiences as related to feminism and feminist ideas, and how the ideas of feminism might have led the composer to a self-professed affinity for setting the words of strong, female characters. In Chapter 6, the conversation moves to a more detailed examination of her music, contentrating particularly on her musical influences and practices of text setting and concluding with Larsen's specific advice to singers embarking upon the performance of her repertoire.

The third and final part of the document concentrates on examining Larsen's music in detail, focusing on two song cycle examples: *Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey, 1880-1902* and *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII.*[1] Chapter 7 discusses Larsen's *Songs from Letters,* concentrating on the

character of Calamity Jane and Larsen's characterization through musical means. The chapter also explores her use of musical return in each movement as a psychological tool. Finally, Larsen's compositional treatment of specific motives throughout the song cycle is examined in depth.

In Chapter 8, I develop my discussion of *Try Me, Good King* as a dramatic guide for performance. The ideas center on Larsen's specific choices for text, and how her text setting creates a dramatic trajectory that tells the story of the "royal curse" experienced by the wives. The role of the lute songs as well as other motivic devices are crucial to this dramatic interpretation which suggests and explores particular vocal clues and interpretative ideas based on Larsen's dramatic realization of the story.

Chapter 9 serves as a conclusion for the entire document, drawing together the major components of this research: feminism, aspects of identity associated with female composers, and composer Libby Larsen and her music. The conclusion offers a new approach to research regarding women in music and specifically Libby Larsen. Examining female composers' experiences through different perspectives of feminism provides a basis for fresh interpretations of their music.

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[1] Regarding *Try Me, Good King*, there are two dissertations available that have examined the cycle in depth: Angela R. Day's DMA document from Louisiana State University "A Performer's Guide to Libby Larsen's *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII* (2008) and Cynthia Conner-Bess' PhD dissertation from West Virginia University "The use of a five-part lens to create musical 'portraits' of the five queens in 'Try Me, Good King' by Libby Larsen'" (2009). Both documents provide a wealth of historical information about the queens and their placement in English history. Day's document gives a recipe of sorts for performance, concentrating on Larsen's motives and vocal considerations, as well as detailed information about Larsen's compositional process. Conner-Bess's research is rich with content regarding the cultural and social aspects of the wives, Larsen's compositional style, the relationship between voice and piano, and the experience of the cycle as heard by the listener.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Chapter 1: Feminism in America and the "Woman Composer Question"

Experiences of women in different fields and capacities differ markedly before and after particular feminist movements (or "waves") in American society. Issues of gender, race and class figure strongly in the experiences of women at different times in American history. For American female composers, these issues have played an even stronger role in their experiences making and living with music. The disparity between male and female composers' experiences is broader, particularly when one examines this disparity around the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America.[2] Many factors contribute to these disparities, including education, money, gender roles and gender expectations. Each of these factors will be examined through the lens of American female composers: how far women have come in composing music and how the various waves of feminism have affected their experiences. This study addresses the question of the category "women composers" and how or whether historical women composers have approached the various problems and issues in applying the label or identity of being a woman composer in relation to the general, implied category of "composer," which was otherwise considered a male or masculine enterprise.

Several ideas and questions are central to considering the different ways that women have reacted to the categorization of "women composers" in relation to their artistic work as composers. Why was composition such a difficult field for women to navigate early in our American history? What music were women composing early in our history and why? What were their experiences and what role did their gender play (if

[2] Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2001), 92.

any) in their music making? Drawing upon the experiences of particular composers, correlations will be drawn between the feminist waves and the women composing in our country. Specific composers to be discussed include Amy Beach (Chapter 3), Mabel Daniels, Marion Bauer, Miriam Gideon (each discussed in Chapter 4), and primarily, Libby Larsen (Chapters 5 through 8). Libby Larsen serves as a modern example of an American woman composer. Through personal interviews as well as traditional research, this document will explore her musical experiences as related to feminism, gender disparity and gender roles. Libby Larsen is a composer who chooses to dramatize particularly strong female characters in her song cycles. Concentrating on the cycles *Songs from Letters* and *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII,* female experiences (such as gender roles with Calamity Jane and power struggles with the wives of Henry VIII) will be explored through the lens of Larsen's musical setting and dramatization.

The concentration for this research lies in the musical genre of song. The reason for such concentration is primarily historical. The first women who were participating in music in America were in fact singers.[3] For many women, the transition from performing to composing was a relatively easy jump. While this may be the case, the real difficulty lay in finding success by creating music. And, this fact is applicable to both men and women. Composition that results in a "successful" musical work requires education and money, as well as publication, performance and recording."[4] These factors make composition quite difficult, regardless of gender. Christine Ammer examines this problem in depth in her text *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* and states

[3] Ammer, 15.
[4] Ibid., 92.

"But for women who wished to compose, this challenge was compounded by lack of education and lack of financial support, not to mention lack of positive encouragement."[5] Without the proper support and study, women in early American music had a very difficult time breaking into composition.

Despite all these roadblocks in promoting music by women, some women manage to compose. But often, musical composition was undertaken at the expense of a woman's femininity. "Composing was inherently a masculine province. If women succeeded at it, they were betraying their femininity, except insofar as they expressed feminine delicacy and other approved virtues in a sentimental love song or graceful piano piece for the salon."[6] The reality was that smaller forms (such as parlor pieces, songs, piano pieces for children, etc.) were largely what a woman could be expected to compose in this early American period. As Ammer addresses at length, composing music in smaller forms historically allowed a woman to maintain her feminine qualities while being appreciated in the musical world.[7] As history progressed, this tendency toward strictly small forms slowly changed as women experimented with larger symphonic and operatic forms. The emphasis on smaller form for women composers is the historical basis for the concentration on solo song in this study.

The various waves of feminism in America find their way into conversations about women making music. "Feminism is a social movement whose basic goal is equality between women and men."[8] Exploring feminism though the lens of the

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[5] Ammer, 92.
[6] Ibid., 94.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics, 4th Ed.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

American woman composer's "problem" exposes correlations and connections to the waves of feminism and the rights that were gained by each wave. These waves of feminism address particular aspects of discrimination between men and women in our history. The first wave of feminism began in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second wave of feminism took its shape in the 1960s and is the wave of feminism largely connected to the primary example of Libby Larsen. The second wave of feminism also saw the launch of several women's musical organizations (i.e. The League of Women Composers and American Women Composer, Inc.[9]). These organizations helped to promote women's music and establish more opportunities for women composing and are currently incorporated as the International Alliance for Women in Music.[10]

The International Alliance for Women in Music (IAWM) has concentrated its efforts on fostering and encouraging the activities of women in music by promoting the programming of female composers' music, discouraging discrimination against women in musical spheres (such as female symphony orchestra members) and increasing the accounts of women musicians in college curriculum and texts.[11] Because of the groundwork laid by organizations such as IAWM, contemporary American women have had better experiences in their musical pursuits. This is certainly the case for Libby Larsen. Larsen in fact played a significant role in organizing for compositional groups, for example, cofounding the Minnesota Composers Forum in 1973.[12] Libby Larsen is

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[9] Jeannie G. Pool, "America's Women Composers: Up from the Footnotes," *Music Educators Journal* 65, no. 5 (1979): 36.

[10] Ibid., 36.

[11] *International Alliance for Women in Music* [website online]; available from http://iawm.org; Internet; accessed 8 July 2013.

[12] Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature* (Redmond: PST…INC, 2000), 294.

drawn to setting the words of women in her music, often focusing on female characters that tell true and engaging stories. This affinity for female texts shows Larsen as an excellent example of a woman composing for women. "In choosing texts for her vocal works, Larsen is drawn to the writings of creative women with powerful personalities – some examples: Calamity Jane (Martha Jane Cannary Hickok), Georgia O'Keefe, and Phyillis McGinley."[13] Adding to this list the cycle *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII,* one sees a composer who is drawn to a woman's life and experiences. An important source for my work on Libby Larsen comes from a personal interview with the composer, which was conducted by the author on April 27, 2011 in St. Paul MN. This interview concentrated on questions of feminism and the correlations between the feminist movements as experienced by Larsen in her music making (Chapters 5 and 6). *Songs from Letters* and *Try Me, Good King* are examples Larsen's affinity for female characters and her desire to share their experiences. The musical examination of these song cycles can be seen in Chapters 7 and 8. In Libby Larsen's own words, she is a person who "hears her way into the world."[14] Through the ears of Libby Larsen, the experiences of women, feminism and the connection to song composition are explored, examined and exposed. The following chapter offers a basic timeline of feminist waves in America, providing a foundation of feminist theory from which to launch a further examination of women composers and how (if at all) they have approached the issues of identity and labeling in musical spheres.

[13] Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature* (Redmond: PST…INC, 2000), 294.

[14] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

Chapter 2: Feminism Waves and Gender Inequality

To enable an understanding of how feminist ideas and theories interact with American women composer's experiences, different waves of feminism and their goals and achievements will be briefly examined. Feminist theory and values arose out of a desire and need for culture to achieve gender equality where otherwise inequality had been reigning in societies for centuries. The waves of feminism and their roles in achieving gender equality are documented in Judith Lorber's text *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics.* In describing the arrival of feminist ideals in modern society, Lorber states "As an organized movement, modern feminism rose in the nineteenth century in Europe, America, and Japan in response to the great inequalities between the legal statuses of women and men citizens."[15] Those who may not fully comprehend the complexity of "feminism" in America may not know that the feminist movement was not simply one movement in time where women gained equal rights. In actuality, the feminist movement has been construed in three general waves. Equality cannot be expected to happen all at once when strong inequities have stood for so long in human society and culture.

Modern feminism's first wave began in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the ultimate goal of achieving basic rights that had been otherwise denied to women. These primary rights were the right to vote (or suffrage), property ownership, the right to borrow money, to receive inheritance, to keep money earned, to initiate divorce, to attend college, to keep child custody, to become a physician, to argue in court

[15] Lorber, 1.

and to serve as a member of a jury.[16] Liberal political philosophy provided the basic theory of equality that first wave feminists focused upon in their actions toward achieving equal rights. First wave feminism's goal was to gain equal legal rights for women, especially the vote (suffrage). In the United States, this right was nationally achieved in 1920.[17] The liberal political philosophy that influenced this goal stated "All men should be equal under the law, that no one should have special privileges or rights."[18] While this liberal political philosophy was clearly present in the U.S. Constitution, it did not apply to women or enslaved men, as neither group was considered free citizens. The first wave of feminism strove to change this practice.

As a result of suffrage, a necessity for progression toward equality was becoming more evident in other aspects of American life. Thus, this time in American history also saw women beginning to make headway in the musical world. Bolstered by the success of suffrage, the 1930s saw women more aggressively struggling to obtain equality with men in the musical world. The equality they were seeking would mean more women assembled in performance, more women's music performed, and better recognition for musical effort. The aggressive efforts of the suffragists led to positive changes for women in music: multiple performing groups for women were assembled, an increase of awards and recognition for women composers were given where otherwise they were reserved for male composers (for example, composer Ruth Crawford was the first woman to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1931 for her work *String Quartet*[19]), and women also began to see more of their works programmed by prestigious performing

[16] Lorber, 1.
[17] Ibid., 2.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Pool, 33.

ensembles.[20] Where feminisms' first wave gained suffrage for women, women in music were also making their own progress towards gender equality.

This first wave of feminism accomplished many major goals for women's equality, setting up a foundation for the following waves of feminism to continue in their efforts. Despite the goals accomplished by the first wave of feminism, Lorber acknowledges that there are still many aspects of feminism under debate. For example, she considers the question of whether men and women should be treated equally or equitably:

> The question of difference between women and men, and whether they should be treated *equally* because they are essentially the same or *equitably* because they are essentially different, is still under debate. The question of where feminist politics should put the most effort – the public sphere (work and government) or the private sphere (family and sexuality) – is also still with us.[21]

This concept of equally or equitably is one of significant contention in the discussion of women composers when considered in conjunction with the use of the term "woman composer." Some of the composers to be examined would prefer a truly "equal" treatment in relation to their male counterparts (i.e. Miriam Gideon) while other female composers acknowledge clear differences between male and female composers, seeking more "equitable" treatment (i.e. Marion Bauer). As each composer example is discussed in the following pages, their personal opinions on the use of the term "woman composer" will also be important in describing their experiences. This use of the term "woman composer" connects the idea of equal or equitable perspectives in accounts of feminist history with female composers' experiences.

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[20] Pool, 33.
[21] Lorber, 3.

The second and third waves of feminism followed from the advances and setbacks of the first wave. The second wave of feminism took its shape as an organized political movement in the late 1960s, although it began much earlier in the late 1940s in France with the publication of a controversial text by Simone de Beavoir, entitled *The Second Sex*.[22] This second wave continued into the 1970s and 1980s with a concentration on increasing the legal rights of women, including the right to political representation and the entry of women into primarily male dominated occupational fields.[23] This second wave of feminism in America is the wave that influenced and affected Libby Larsen's experiences as she was coming into her own as a musician and composer. Larsen's experiences as a composer and musician as related to the second wave of feminism will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

The 1990s included different types of feminism. These types of feminism included "multiracial/multiethnic feminism, feminist studies of men, constructionist, postmodern, and queer theories, [challenging] 'what everyone knows' about sex, sexuality, and gender."[24] The 1990s, while including these various and complex concepts of feminism, brought about the third wave of feminism.

> *Third-wave feminism,* which also emerged in the 1990s, is a movement of younger feminists who grew up with feminism. Inheritors of women's studies curricula in school and a much less gender-segregated social, economic, and political world, they reject the idea that women are oppressed by men. Rather, they include men as feminist activists. They assume that gender equality is the norm, and that women's agency and female sexuality are forms of power. [25]

[22] Lorber, 3.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 4.
[25] Ibid.

The third wave of feminism was also more inclusive ethnically and racially, particularly in contrast to the often white, academic women promoters for the earlier era (the so-called second wave). Through these waves of feminism, women have gained much in the way of general rights. Nonetheless, a primary goal of feminist activism is to deter gender inequality, a concept that calls upon the aforementioned distinction between equity and equality. Gender inequality maintains the fact that there are still many disparities between men and women. For example, women are still receiving lower pay as well as reaching certain glass ceilings in the workforce. Gender roles in society shed light on some of these gender inequalities. "… The gender arrangements of most societies assume that women will do the work of bearing and caring for children while men will do the work of protecting and supporting them economically."[26] These gender arrangements call to mind the previous discussion of women's femininity in musical compositions. As early American composers were denied education, patronage and opportunity, so the gender roles and expectations for child-rearing and family life often interfered with their musical aspirations. The use of pseudonyms calls attention to an important aspect of the early American woman composer's experiences. The use of false names and identity denial can make the tracking of early female composers in American particularly difficult. Jeannie G. Pool gives two reasons for this practice in her article "America's Women Composers: Up from the Footnotes."

> Women composers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are sometimes difficult to trace for two primary reasons. First, they often were reluctant to reveal accurate birth dates, and second, they sometimes used pseudonyms. For example, there is a song written prior to 1825 entitled "The Evening Tide Is Flowing," which is signed by "A Lady from Nashville."… Another problem in trying to

[26] Lorber, 5.

> identify some of these early composers is that many of the extant songs are not dated, and sometimes even the publisher is not identified.[27]

While the waves of feminism in this country did much to help create equal rights for women, female composers still struggled to find their place in the musical world, particularly earlier in American history. The activism efforts put forth by the advocates of feminist waves (i.e. suffrage, entry of women into predominantly male occupations, and multiethnic/social feminist inclusion) bolstered women in all fields to move progressively towards equality. Without that progression, female composers today would likely still be trapped composing mainly in the small forms and conforming to the gender expectations put upon them. This concept of smaller versus larger forms is central to the argument of "the female composer's problem" presented in the next chapter. Gender expectations and inequality were major components of the early American female composer's experience. For example, access to education, patronage, publication and performance were limited for early American female composers compared to their male counterparts. More examples of gender inequality and gender roles as related to composing will be presented in the following chapter, calling upon Amy Beach's experiences and Beach as an exemplary female American composer.

[27] Pool, 30.

Chapter 3: Amy Beach and The American Female Composer's Problem

Why was music composition such a difficult field for women composers to negotiate? Factors such as lack of opportunity, lack of patronage and lack of general support for the extensive study that is required for professional composition were the consequence of certain gender role inequities that women in music consistently faced.[28] Gender roles and prescribed identity worked as strong deterrents for women who wished to pursue their own interests. For women who wished a career in music, gender identity and the expectations put upon them were consistently seen to be a barrier between composer and artistic pursuits.

> Economic necessity leads [women] either to marriage or to gainful employment; neither is conducive to composition. Moreover, when they do manage to compose, they cannot get their works published or performed. Some have gotten around this difficulty by publishing under masculine, or at least ambiguous, pseudonyms, and some by financing their own performances…[29]

The concept of pseudonyms sheds more light on the inequalities between men and women in the compositional field by pinpointing the reality that women were often forced to deny their gender identity in order to promote and compose freely. Interestingly, this discrimination is one that was somewhat limited to music composition. In America in the eighteenth century, cultural and social leanings suggest that performing salon music was actually a pastime considered mostly appropriate for women rather than men.[30] As the musical traditions in America were developing, women were at the forefront in preserving and protecting these traditions. However, this acceptance of women in music did not extend into composition. "Women were met with discrimination

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[28] Ammer, 92.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Pool, 29.

if they chose to compose or conduct and for the most part were denied full educational opportunities necessary for preparation in these careers."[31] Upon examining these various roadblocks (lack of education, discrimination toward salon performance as the only appropriate musical pursuit for women, the necessity for pseudonyms, etc.), it seems impossible that women in these early days could manage to compose a piece of music.

Musicologists and musicians alike often questioned the musical abilities of women in the nineteenth century. Much speculation about women's capabilities has been presented by leading American music journalists since the 1880s. The question of women's compositional capabilities is derived from the argument that there has been no female "Bach" or "Beethoven." There are many different views that American music journalists have taken in this argument: unsympathetic (i.e. women do not have the talent, concentration or perseverance), nonsensical (women cannot compose due to the restrictions of their vocal range), and sympathetic (women were not provided the same opportunity as men).[32] When it came to composition, women were faced with seemingly insurmountable odds. When a woman did manage to compose music, her compositions were often considered at the expense of her womanhood and femininity.[33] Jeannie G. Pool identified this discrimination which women in the 1800s found in composing music rather than performing. She continues this dialogue acknowledging the result of such prejudice against women composing. "The prejudice against women composers inevitably led to the development of a sexual aesthetic that limited women to composing parlor music, such as songs, light piano studies, and beginning etudes for children, in

[31] Pool, 29.
[32] Ammer, 94.
[33] Ibid.

order to maintain their femininity."[34] Here again women and female identity are presented as a critical element in the American female composer's experience, and the heart of the "female composer's problem" is illuminated. While women were equipped with the creative capacity for the composition of larger forms, they were denied the education required to compose in these forms, as well as being confined by their feminine identity. Ammer addresses this idea of small form further. "Indeed, one present-day musicologist [Judith Tick] suggests that this is the very reason the popular nineteenth-century parlor song became a feminine genre: if they were not actually written by women, since men wrote them too, they were at least written to be sung by women and for female audiences."[35] The smaller forms (piano pieces, solo song, etc.) were often where the early American woman found success in her compositions. And this practice would hold true for many years to come.

Change would come slowly for American women in music. With the nineteenth century came some important advances for women intending to embark upon musical pursuits. For example, women's commercial publications became more common in the middle of the nineteenth century, including some works by women in song collections.[36] Between 1870 and 1900, even greater changes were seen for women musicians in America.

> Before 1870, American women concentrated almost exclusively on piano and vocal music, but by 1900 they were playing a wider range of instruments; quality music education had opened up to women; and the number of women composers increased. During the late nineteenth century, many American women, particularly from the middle classes, also entered the labor force and turned to

[34] Pool, 29.
[35] Ammer, 94.
[36] Pool, 30.

music and music education for a self-supporting income. Music education soon became a predominantly female occupation.[37]

The nineteenth century brought many changes for women in American music, and these changes allowed women to have a stronger purpose and place in musical spheres. The mid-nineteenth century also saw the emergence of America's first outstanding female composer: Amy Marcy Cheney Beach.

Musicologists and music historians consider Amy Beach to be the first American woman to succeed as a composer of large-scale art music.[38] Amy Beach was the daughter of Charles Abbott Cheney, a paper manufacturer, and Clara Imogene (Marcy) Cheney. Her mother was a gifted amateur singer and a pianist as well. The Cheneys were a distinguished family in New England.[39] Beach showed her natural inclinations toward music at a young age. By the age of two, she was singing many songs with particular accuracy and by the age of four was composing her own melodies and musical pieces.[40] Beach came from a family of wealth and of musical background. Her background may not have been of nobility or a family of musicians supported by a patron, but with her family's money and her mother's influence, she found herself well positioned to pursue a musical career.

In 1871, the Cheney family relocated to Chelsea, Massachusetts (now in Boston) and it was there that Beach's mother began to teach her to play piano. Her lessons from her mother began at age six and by age seven, she began performing her first recitals of

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[37] Pool, 31.

[38] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; available from http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02409?q=amy+beach&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 4 April 2013.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ammer, 96.

Handel, Chopin, Beethoven, and even her own compositions.[41] In 1875, the family moved again to Boston and it was there where Beach would reside for the next thirty-five years. Rather than send Beach abroad to Europe to study further, her family chose local piano training in Ernst Perabo and Carl Baermann, as well as engaging the organist Junius W. Hill as her teacher of harmony.[42] Her professional debut came in Boston on October 24th, 1883, playing Chopin's Rondo in E-flat and the Moscheles's G minor Concerto with orchestra.[43] Her debut was quite successful and led to another few years of appearances with the Boston Symphony among other performances. But, by December of 1885, her professional career as a concert pianist came to a virtual end. In that month and year, she married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a well-known surgeon and music lover.[44] With the encouragement of her husband, Beach began to concentrate her musical efforts on composition, despite the absence of extensive formal training.

Without extensive training in music composition,, she turned to the advice of Wilhelm Gericke, conductor of the Boston Symphony, as to how to proceed in her education. It was Gericke who suggested an independent study of the masters.[45] She proceeded to train herself, translating into English treatises of Berlioz and Gevaert and

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[41] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; available from http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02409?q=amy+beach&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 9 April 2013.

[42] Ammer, 96.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ammer, 97.

[45] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; available from http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02409?q=amy+beach&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 9 April 2013.

teaching herself the art of fugue, double fugue, composition and orchestration.[46] In her early attempts at composition, Beach concentrated on the smaller form of solo song, and found her first published successes. "In December 1886 the *Musical Herald* announced the publication of 'Ariette,' a setting of a Shelley poem that the reviewer said was 'dainty yet sufficiently passionate,' and 'the guitar effect is well sustained throughout.'"[47] Gender expectations of femininity and grace influenced Beach's early compositions (i.e. "dainty yet passionate"). In these sentimental words, the idea of female identity in women's composition is already at work.

By 1888, Beach was publishing her first instrumental music. Through her instrumental compositions and her first forays into larger forms, her progress continued. This progress was leading her to be considered the first successful female composer in Boston.

> Moreover, despite her youth and sex she was already recognized by Boston's musical establishment; at the commencement of exercises of the New England Conservatory in 1891 Amy Beach, then twenty-three, served on the piano awards committee, along with Arthur Foote and Edward MacDowell. And in December of that year, commenting on her anthem, "Praise the Lord All Ye Nations," Elson [a well-known critic of the era] said, "Boston at last possesses a female composer of merit able to cope with the large as well as the small forms of musical creation."[48]

In February of 1892, her first large work, Mass in E-Flat op. 5 (for full chorus, soloists, orchestra, and organ) was premiered by the Handel and Haydn Society under

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[46] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; available from http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02409?q=amy+beach&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 9 April 2013.

[47] Ammer, 97.

[48] Ibid.

conductor Carl Zerrahn.[49] She continued to break gender barriers with other musical organizations as well. Later in 1892, the New York Symphony Society under Walter Damrosch performed her scene and aria "Eilende Wolken" (for contralto and orchestra) from Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, making hers the first work by a woman composer at these concerts.[50] As a result of the overall success of her Mass in E-flat, the Boston musical establishment confirmed her abilities as a composer of large form. For example, Louis Elson, a well-known music critic of this era, in reference to her anthem "Praise the Lord All Ye Nations," was quoted as saying "Boston at last possesses a female composer of merit able to cope with the large as well as the small forms of musical creation."[51] In the 1890s, she was especially prolific, composing over sixty shorter works for piano, violin, voice and several cantatas. This list includes one of her most popular songs, "Ecstasy" op. 19.[52]

Following these compositions came what was perhaps the most important composition of Beach's life for this discussion: her *Gaelic Symphony*, op. 32. The premiere took place on October 30, 1896 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under Emil Paur.[53] With this symphony came a major breakthrough for women in music; it was the first symphony by an American woman to be performed by an American orchestra.[54] The *Gaelic Symphony* shows influences of Wagner and Brahms in the use of folk motifs and harmonic vocabulary. But, as Ammer points out, the stylistic traits are also reflective of Beach, characterized by flowing melodies, chromaticism and the use of all the tones

[49] Ammer, 97.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 98.
[53] Ammer, 98.
[54] Pool, 31.

(regardless of key), particularly at the point of musical climax.[55] While the Mass in E-flat was only performed once in Beach's life, the *Gaelic Symphony* would go on to be featured in over nine other city orchestras, including Chicago, New York and Philadelphia.[56]

Though many people revered Amy Beach's talents in composition, she still received criticism evident of gender expectations and discriminations. Women composers of the time often received judgment from music critics and journalists, frequently treated with the double standard of being "too feminine" or "too masculine."[57] Beach did not escape such criticism. One example of this criticism can be seen in a review of Beach's Violin Sonata in the music journal *Etude* from March of 1897. The review stated, "Beach's Violin Sonata was excellent, feminine in sentiment but worked out in a broad, masculine spirit worthy of a man."[58] Gender ideology and expectations permeated music criticism of the day, and these ideas of masculine and feminine in composition could not be escaped, regardless of the woman's capabilities and creative tendencies. Regarding feminine tendencies in composition, Beach's next major compositions included three settings of poems by Robert Browning in her op. 44, that drew upon his highly sentimental and sincere poetic imagery. "The Year's at the Spring" and "Ah, Love But a Day!" continue to be performed today, the first being a simple Schubertian type Lied and the latter a Brahms' inspired chromatic melody.[59] In song Beach shows her musical talent and understanding. In her early songs, she demonstrates a clear ability and tendency

[55] Ammer, 99.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 100.

toward long lines and a sensitive understanding of the relationship between music and text. "Song is at the core of her style – she used some of her songs as themes in her instrumental works (e.g. the Symphony, the Piano Concerto op. 45 and the Piano Trio op. 150)- but her remarkable ear for harmony and harmonic colour is also apparent from the beginning."[60]

Amy Beach influenced the musical culture of the day. Her position as the most highly regarded female composer of the age led to the creation of many Amy Beach clubs in different towns, often sparred by a local piano teacher with particular interest in Beach and her compositions. [61] These Amy Beach clubs exemplify the growing impact that Beach had on the musical world, particularly when viewed from the standpoint of gender. The formation of Amy Beach clubs calls to mind the historical Schubertiade: small, informal events, which honored and celebrated the music of Franz Schubert. For a female composer to receive a similar treatment by her aficionados displays a turning point in gender disparities for female composers.

Though her exposure and appreciation was growing in America, Beach did not travel to Europe until her husband's death in 1910. Her husband had encouraged her musical composition, but discouraged her performance. This changed when she traveled to Europe in 1911. She stayed there for four years and began public performances again, appearing with German orchestras and with chamber groups as well.[62] Following this stint abroad, Beach returned to America in 1914 and recommenced her public

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[60] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; available from http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02409?q=amy+beach&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 9 April 2013.

[61] Ammer, 101.

[62] Ibid.

performances. The year 1915 found Amy Beach giving several interviews where she discussed her opinions on composition as well as addressing questions of the woman's role in music. These interviews revealed a deeply sensitive musician, but one who believed in a firm technical foundation for expressions said emotions. "Concerning the status of women composers, in 1915 she said that she herself had never felt limited as a woman and had encountered no prejudice; she believed the opportunities for men and women were equal."[63] In this sentiment, Amy Beach reveals her own opinions on women's place in musical composition.

> In Worcester [1931] she told Raymond Morin, 'One thing I have learned from my audiences is that young women artists and composers shouldn't be afraid to pitch right in and try. If they think they have something to say, let them say it. But let them be sure to build a technique with which to say it. The technique mustn't be visible, but it must be there.'[64]

Amy Beach's ideas stated in 1931 reflect a similar sentiment felt by Libby Larsen in 2011. Larsen's main motto when asked about what women in music should do to combat prejudice and discrimination is to simply "not ask for permission and to just do the work."[65] While eighty years separate these two famous women in music, their feelings and opinions about the work of women in music are similar. Their similar opinions on being a woman in musical composition address the heart of the female composer's problem. While Larsen and Beach had a similar sentiment on the subject, other composers (such as Mabel Wheeler Daniels, Marion Bauer and Miriam Gideon to be examined in the following chapter) felt differently. The contrasting sentiments felt by female composers expose the personal and unique aspects of this question of identity for

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[63] Ammer, 103.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

women in music. Where a female composer would fall in this question of using the label of "women composer" often was directly related to their personal values and experiences in music making. While Beach admittedly felt no prejudice as a woman in composition, it is impossible she could have overlooked the fact that she was identified as the leading woman composer, rather than the leading American or even Boston composer of the day.[66] Perhaps due to this fact, Beach was inspired to become the president of the Society of American Women Composers in 1924. The Society of American Women Composers was an organization that would go on to foster more female composers and their musical development.

The question of necessity for the term "woman composer" continues to arise when discussing women in music. The following chapter examines three additional American female composers: Mabel Wheeler Daniels, Marian Bauer and Miriam Gideon. The decision to discuss these three composers in detail lies in their professed opinions and statements of self, regarding their gender and their composing. Each of these three women held a contrasting opinion on the term "woman composer." The topic of gender roles, expectations and ideology is multi-faceted. By addressing each of these composer's contrasting opinions through their musical experiences, the question of the female composer's problem is given more depth and more facets for understanding. The following chapter begins with a discussion of Mabel Wheeler Daniels, a female composer with a strikingly different opinion of women in music and particularly the use of the term "woman composer."

[66] Ammer, 103.

Chapter 4: Predecessors of Twentieth Century American Composers

Mabel Wheeler Daniels (1877-1971), like Amy Beach, came from a musical family. Her grandfather William Daniels was an organist and active member of the Handel and Haydn Society from 1844-1886 while her other grandfather was a choral conductor. Additionally, both her parents were singers and sang with the Handel and Haydn Society.[67] With the help of her familial connections to music, Daniels was able to use family money to pursue a career in composition. Daniels, like Beach, showed her natural musical inclinations at an early age, beginning piano lessons quite young and writing her first piece *Fairy Charm Waltz* at age 10.[68] Daniels's education began at Radcliff College where she sang in the Glee Club, starred in the operettas, and went on compose for the group.[69] Following her time at Radcliff, she continued her musical education at the New England Conservatory, studying orchestration and composition under Chadwick.[70] Daniels would then proceed to Germany, studying at the Munich Conservatory. At the Munich Conservatory in 1901, she broke major ground as a woman in musical study, becoming the first ever female in Ludvig Thuille's score-reading class.[71] Other highlights from her musical career included directing the Radcliff Glee Club from 1911 to 1913 as well as landing a prestigious position as the head of music at Simmons College in Boston from 1913-1918.[72] Musically, Daniels's compositions

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[67] Ammer, 108.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/07177?q=mabel+daniels&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

feature angular melodic lines, non-functional harmony, and a stylistic influence reminiscent of Debussy through sparse orchestration and augmented chords.[73] These characteristics of her composition are particularly evident in her first significant orchestral piece *Deep Forest* published in 1932, which is stylistically linked to Debussy's *Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un faune*.[74] Though her compositions included orchestral works such as *Deep Forest* (1932), she also excelled in vocal writing. Her choral pieces remain her most recognized works today.

Daniels found herself in a prime position to become an advocate for women in music, and was connected to the other premiere female composers of the day. She served as an active member of the Society of American Composers. "She was a good friend of many women composers, especially Amy Beach, Margaret Lang, and Helen Hopekirk (Hopekirk rode along in her carriage during a suffragist demonstration in 1915).[75] While she worked for women's suffrage and acknowledged the long-standing discrimination that women musicians experienced, she did not consider herself a feminist, nor did she appreciate or revel in the term "woman composer."[76] Her feelings on this subject were clearly mixed. She had highly contrasting ideas to those of Beach, particularly regarding women, identity and musical composition.

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[73] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/07177?q=mabel+daniels&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ammer, 109.

[76] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/07177?q=mabel+daniels&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.

Daniels's opinion on female composers was based on the idea that women were handicapped in two ways. The first handicap lay in the reality of feminine obligations: women had more time-consuming jobs to do as opposed to men (meaning domestic routines and responsibilities). Secondly, Daniels was of the opinion that women generally did not have the "physical strength" to compose extensively in symphonic and operatic forms, or other types of music for concert. Hers was the opinion that the "burden" of writing down the notes, dynamics, accents and phrasing for each part of an orchestral piece of music was very hard work. For this reason, Daniels said that women typically concentrated their efforts in the smaller forms.[77]

In her opinions on this matter, Daniels exposes her conflicted feelings about women and feminist values. Serving in the American Society of Women Composers and engaging in suffragist demonstrations shows a connection to the women's cause. But in regards to composition, she addresses clear social-cultural differences between men and women. Her admission as to women's roles in the household and the identity with which women live their daily lives allows an important glimpse into many female composers' experiences. By "sticking to the small forms," Daniels shows once again the common necessity to adhere to gender roles and gender expectations in composition. Her ideas on femininity and identity aside, she did have solid advice for the female composer of the day. According to Christine Ammer, Daniels stated: "Four requisites, she maintained, are indispensable to any woman composer, over and above talent: a strong constitution, perseverance, ingenuity, and above all, courage."[78]

[77] Ammer, 110.
[78] Ibid.

Marion Bauer (1887-1955) is a female composer with another strong and contrasting opinion on women in music and their position and purpose. Bauer was born in Washington and began musical studies with her sister Emilie, undertaking piano lessons and eventually moving to New York to study with Henry Holden Huss and Eugene Heffley.[79] Bauer differs strongly from Beach and Daniels in the extent of her European exposure and experience. In 1906, she made her first trip to Paris, studying under Nadia Boulanger and Raoul Pugno. This exposure to France and the French musical teachers allowed Bauer more acceptances in musical spheres versus other well known female composers like Beach and Daniels. In the early 1920s, France had replaced Germany as the musical center of Europe. By traveling to France and studying under the very famous Boulanger, Bauer secured her place among men, where the other women before her had not.[80] Bauer's music is driven primarily through melody, utilizing an extended sense of tonality and emphasizing colorful harmonic movement and diatonic dissonance. Impressionistic and romantic influences are featured in her works, as well as deviations from conventional tonality to a more post-tonal idiom, particularly evident in her pieces *Quietude* and *Turbulence* from 1924.[81] Like other female composers of her time, she participated in many organizations, including founding the American Music Guild in 1921 and contributing to the Society of American Women Composers. She frequently found herself the only female in positions of leadership in these

[79] Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.
[80] Ammer, 148.
[81] Hisama, 5.

organizations.[82] For example, she was the sole woman on the executive board of the American Composers Alliance.[83]

In the 1930s, Bauer continued to advance her career composing, writing and teaching in New York. 1926 saw another groundbreaking development as Bauer secured a position as the first woman faculty member at New York University's music department.[84] Compositionally, she focused her early works on songs and piano solos, finding concentration like the other women composers of the day in the smaller forms.[85] She briefly experimented with twelve-tone writing in the 1940s and 50s. For example, her work *Patterns* (ca. 1940) is an example of her trials in serialism.[86] Despite these experiments, she generally preferred tonality, harmony and diatonic dissonance.[87] Nonetheless, Daniels was a champion of modern music. Her writings and lectures in the 1930s showed an embracing opinion on modernism and atonality.[88] In addition to writing, composition and lecturing, she found acceptance and prestige in music criticism. According to Ellie Hisama, Bauer's position as a music critic allowed her significant influence in musical spheres. Her intelligent approach toward new music and her ability

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[82] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02353?q=marion+bauer&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.

[83] Ammer, 147.

[84] Hisama, 5.

[85] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02353?q=marion+bauer&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.

[86] Hisama, 5.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

to explain modern music understandably in lectures and in her text *Twentieth-Century Music* earned her universal respect amongst musicologists and music theorists.[89]

This position of widespread respect provided Bauer with an excellent platform for promoting women in music. According to Melissa J. DeGraff, on numerous occasions she championed women in music.

> During a 1937 New York Composers' Forum concert, composer Marion Bauer was asked to explain the scarcity of women composers. Bauer replied: "There are a great many more than you think. What many women composers need is encouragement and an opportunity to work and to be taken seriously… Just think of us as composers and never call us lady composers."[90]

Her opinion on being called a "lady composer" differed from other composers of the day. Where Beach felt no prejudice and Daniels acknowledged differences between men and women composers, Bauer strove for acceptance and equality. Further, she is quoted as saying "My early aspiration was not to listen to the sly remarks of intolerant men regarding women composers… [but rather] that if given a reasonable chance for development, an individual talent, regardless of sex, can progress and grow."[91] Hers was a standpoint that called for both equality and equity of the sexes. While the term "woman composer" may have been a necessity of the time, it did not prevent Bauer from promoting women in music every way she could. "*Twentieth Century Music* mentions a number of women composers – Ruth Crawford, Louise Talma, Germaine Tailleferre, Ethel Glenn Hier, Rosalie Housman, Miriam Gideon, Ulric Cole, Vivian Fine, Evelyn

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[89] Ammer, 148.

[90] Melissa J. De Graff, " 'Never Call Us Lady Composers': Gendered Receptions in the New York Composers' Forum, 1935-1940," *American Music* 26, no. 3 (2008), 277.

[91] Ammer, 149.

Berckman, and Dorothy James, among others."[92] Where women had been suspiciously absent from many American music texts, Bauer had put them on the map. By writing, composing and lecturing, she gave the women composers' cause its loudest and strongest voice to date.

Another figure in the field of female composers with strong opinion was Miriam Gideon (1906-1996). Her experience as a woman composer has another aspect that is distinct from the composers previously addressed in that she was of Jewish heritage. Her Jewish heritage created another aspect of internalized discrimination, and her opinions about the term "woman composer" are directly linked to her feelings about being a "Jewish composer." Gideon also differs from other composers previously discussed in that she did not come from a family of musicians, but rather a family of educators.[93] Her family moved to New York where she began to study piano with Hans Barth and commenced music classes at Yonkers High School. As her family was not musically inclined (lacking a piano and a phonograph, for instance), she faced many limitations to her musical development at home.[94] Due to these limitations, her family, wishing to continue her musical education, sent their daughter to Boston to study with her uncle, an organist and conductor. In Boston, her musical education would thrive and inspire a desire within her to continue studying and eventually, foster a love of both composing and teaching. She would receive degrees from Boston University, Columbia University

[92] Hisama, 123.
[93] Ibid., 6.
[94] Ibid.

as well as the Jewish Theological Seminary.[95] While in New York, she studied under two private teachers: Lazar Saminsky (from 1931 to 1934) and Roger Sessions (from 1935 to 1943). She began teaching at Brooklyn College in 1944, as well as supplementing this position with a second appointment at City College of the city University of New York from 1947-1955.[96] After being fired from the Brooklyn College in 1953 (which she said was due to conflicting political ideals), she would join the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Her last teaching posts would include City College until 1976 and the Manhattan School of Music from 1967-1991.[97]

As far as her compositional style is concerned, Gideon strove to avoid any single style or system of composition. Rather, she preferred to allow each work to suggest its own form and style, calling upon a musical language that is freely atonal.[98] Her music also employed a lyricism, which at times is "contrasted by a pointed and dramatic intensity."[99] Her primary compositions included chamber music (i.e. *Lyric Piece for Strings,* 1942), song cycles, choral music and keyboard works. Her song compositions show a particularly interesting fascination of featuring more than one language for a single poem.[100] She enjoyed using both the original language as well as a translation

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[95] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/11103?q=miriam+gideon&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 12 April 2013.

[96] Ammer, 293.

[97] Ibid.

[98] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/11103?q=miriam+gideon&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 12 April 2013.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Sharon Mabry, "More Song Cycles by Women Composers," *Journal of Singing* 56, no. 2 (1999): 45.

within the same piece. An example of this can be seen in her song *Steeds of Darkness* (1986). *Steeds of Darkness* is a setting of an Italian poem by Felix Pick, followed by its English version, based on a poem by Eugene Mahon. In Gideon's own words, the setting of Mahon's poem "extracts at white heat the fantasy of the original poem."[101] This innovation and fascination is a hallmark of Gideon's songs and song cycles. Other compositions of note include her works *Mixco* for tenor and piano (1957) and *Of Shadows Numberless* for piano (1966).

Other features of her vocal works include elements of the synagogue services and reminiscences of traditional Judeo-Christian organ and choral music.[102] Gideon's Jewish heritage would prove a significant aspect of her identity in composing and also would provide a comparative point for her feelings about being a "woman composer."

> In a 1970 interview for *Dimensions in American Judaism,* Miriam Gideon was asked if she objected to the term "Jewish composer." She responded: 'I don't object very much. In fact, I can see where it might prove to be of utmost importance to a certain type of composer as a form of symbolic reference. But if I am to be honest I would have to say that I do usually associate it with a kind of singling out – again like the term 'woman composer' and as such implies in my mind, at least, some limitation.'[103]

Gideon held the opinion that by being identified with the term "woman composer" as well as "Jewish composer," she experienced certain limitations in expectations and recognition of herself in relation to others in the musical circles. For a long time, Gideon battled the term "woman composer," eschewing the label and resisting

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[101] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/11103?q=miriam+gideon&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 12 April 2013.

[102] Ammer, 294.

[103] Hisama, 139.

the ideas that she experienced any difficulties in composition due to her gender.[104] This denial gradually lessened with the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. The women's movement put a microscope on all women in every field, not only in music composition. Gideon herself said "for me to talk about the fact that women are discriminated against is unnecessary. They are and have been. But really, I didn't even know I was a woman composer until the movement in the 1960s."[105] This statement by Gideon provides an excellent contrast to the opinions of Marion Bauer, for instance. Where Bauer saw the term "woman composer" as necessary for the bolstering of women in music, Gideon held disdain for the label. She was largely unsympathetic to the cause and category of women composers.[106] She held a particularly strong view on the idea of programming the music of women composers.

> I think there's just one way that [women composers] *shouldn't* [organize], and that is by designing programs of all women's music. Nothing can convince me otherwise because I know what happens in my own case. I find myself unable to be judged as I want to be judged. We like to think of ourselves as *composers*, at least I like to think I am, and I'm sure that all women composers, I guess I would have to say, want to be judged as *composers*, not as *women* composers.[107]

This quote from Gideon illustrates her desire for equality with her male counterparts. Her feelings on the term "woman composer" are certainly conflicted. But at the heart of her feelings is the desire to be acknowledged for herself and her musical contributions, not her contributions as a "Jewish composer" or as a "woman composer."

Each of these women held strong and contrasting standpoints on the idea of the label "woman composer" and on the ideas of gender equality in the field of musical

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[104] Ammer, 295.
[105] Hisama, 139.
[106] Ibid., 140.
[107] Ibid.

composition. Amy Beach never felt limitation as a female composer, and contrastingly, Miriam Gideon saw the label "woman composer" as a limitation in and of itself. Mabel Daniels acknowledged what she saw as concrete differences between men and women in the compositional field, holding the opinion that women should stick to the smaller forms, where their feminine abilities would thrive more fully. Marian Bauer, in contrast, was a champion for women in music, putting herself and other female composers into the musical history books as well as using the term "women composer" to organize and promote women in music. From the earliest women in America composing like Amy Beach to the later composers like Miriam Gideon, their opinions formed a foundation from which the modern example of Libby Larsen emerged. The following chapters commence the detailed discussion of an interview with Libby Larsen, where questions of feminism, female identity and musical experience combine to illuminate a new perspective of Larsen as a woman and a composer.

PART TWO: An Interview with Libby Larsen

Chapter 5: Regarding Feminism

Libby Larsen (b. 1950) is considered one of America's most prolific and widely performed living composers. Her catalogue of musical works includes over four hundred pieces, spanning nearly every genre from small form vocal and chamber music to larger scale symphonies, orchestral works and operas.[108] Infused with American spirit, her music is consistently praised for its relationship to Americana, and this aspect of her composition continues to bring her commissions from around the world.[109] While Larsen was born in Delaware, she moved to Minnesota at the age of three where she has remained for the majority of her life. She claims the nuns at Christ the King School in Minneapolis as her earliest teachers, from whom she learned moveable *do* as well as Gregorian chant. She received her Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate from the University of Minnesota, studying under Dominick Argento, Paul Fetler and Eric Stokes.[110]

Larsen founded the Minnesota Composer's Forum in 1973, now known as the American Composer's Forum.[111] From 1983 to 1987, Larsen held the position of Composer in Residence for the Minnesota Orchestra, breaking major ground in compositional gender disparity by being the first woman to hold such a position with a major orchestra. Larsen went on to serve a similar position as resident composer for the

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[108] *Libby Larsen Website* [website online]; http://libbylarsen.com/index.php?contentID=403; Internet; accessed 15 April 2013.

[109] Ibid.

[110] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/42676?q=libby+larsen&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 15 April 2013.

[111] Ibid.

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra and Colorado Symphony Orchestra.[112] Her compositional life differed somewhat from many of her compositional colleagues in that she never held a permanent academic position. Rather, she supports herself entirely on commissions for her music. She has served as a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota and the California Institute for the Arts, and has guest lectured at many universities. Other highlights of her long career include the receiving of many awards, including a 1994 Grammy for her production of *The Art of Arleen Augér*, which includes her song cycle *Sonnets from the Portuguese* from 1991.[113] *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus* (1990) was her seventh opera, commissioned by Minnesota Opera. This work features a unique blend of video effects, small orchestra and electronic sound, creating an overall effect that shows her particular interest in blending genres of music and media.[114]

Stylistically, Larsen is known for a dynamic musical energy that comes from the sounds she hears in her everyday world. "Her style is noted for its energy, optimism, rhythmic diversity, colorful orchestration, liberated tonality without harsh dissonance, and pervading lyricism."[115] In regards to rhythm, she draws rhythmic elements from the American language, using American vernacular and the rhythms of American life as her musical language. Her oeuvre, while containing many large orchestral works, is particularly well known for vocal and choral works. She is highly drawn to the expressive

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[112] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/42676?q=libby+larsen&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 15 April 2013.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Kimball, 294.

[115] *Grove Music Online* [database online]; *Grove Music Online* [database online]; http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/11103?q=miriam+gideon&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit; Internet; accessed 15 April 2013.

qualities of the voice. Citing the influence of Argento, Larsen prefers to use prose instead of poetry for her song texts, stating, "While I set both poetry and prose, I am more drawn to prose because of its rhythmic freedom and honest emotion. Texts that reveal song, colorful and fearless people, many times women, are especially attractive to me."[116] Larsen's wide-ranging creative output displays a mind that is full of new musical ideas. As a person who hears her way into the world, one hallmark of her compositional style is her attention to strong characters and her ability to put their words, emotions and life into music that conveys a sense of originality and authenticity. By choosing the literal words of historical characters (as in the case of *Songs from Letters* and *Try Me, Good King; Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII*), that authenticity and originality is precisely placed in her music. Truth in text (both in its setting and its use) is a significant example of Larsen's musical authenticity.

The author's personal interview conducted on April 27th, 2011 with the composer, examined specific aspects of her musical career through the lens of feminism in America. Beginning with her experiences in college, Larsen found herself at the University of Minnesota from 1968-1978, coming of age during the second wave of feminism. In her words, she arrived at college as a "troublemaker," attributing this quality of her character to her time in school questioning nuns and certain aspects of the Catholic faith. "I arrived at high school ready to question things deeply. I probably got kicked out of CCD [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine] because I asked why a merciful God would create a hell. That's the source of all my compositions: asking difficult questions of myself."[117]

[116] Kimball, 294.
[117] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

Another example of her early "troublemaking" calls upon a major musical influence for the composer: rock music. Larsen tells the story:

> I had a substitute biology teacher named Dr. Odin who was the only African American teacher I had growing up. He was a brilliant teacher. He told us about his band, which played at the Ebony Bar in St. Paul. My dad took me there and the music was rocking. I went to my music teacher and asked if we could bring this band in for an all-school assembly. He refused. This was the 1960s, a time when people saw "black" music as a danger to white cultural values. So I asked my principal to bring the band in. My principal agreed and the assembly rocked.[118]

This story of Larsen's shows both a person with varied musical interests, but also one with strong convictions. This type of African American rock and gospel music would later become a major musical influence on her personal compositions.

Larsen's experiences in academia were not without difficulties. She began college in 1968, just as the "women's lib" movement was gaining steam. Due to the stiff competition for assistantships at the university, she was unable to get a Teacher's Assistant position. At this point at the University of Minnesota, there was only one female professor: Donna Cardamone-Jackson, a young music history professor from Harvard. Through her work with this one young professor, Larsen found one of her first mentors on women's issues.

> She made me her TA in music history until I started working on my doctorate. It provided me with financial resources to pursue composition and also the opportunity to be mentored by a very strong woman, someone who was threading the needle of feminism by succeeding in the male-dominated world of academia. She was terribly threatening to the "old boys" who had been around for thirty years. I realize now she also needed support; she was actively involved in many campus issues that she handled with grace and care. I really became aware of women's issues through working with her.[119]

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[118] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[119] Ibid.

Her close relationship with Cardamone-Jackson coincided perfectly with the second wave of feminism, and the two would have many conversations about the various issues women were fighting.

Larsen was preparing to graduate into the world of serious musical composition: a predominantly male world. She began her work by seeking out a community where she felt intellectually safe. "I started looking for role models who lived a life of excellence, integrity, professionalism and constant output. I wanted to know how they lived. I started looking at artists like Georgia O'Keeffe, Mary Cassatt, and Joanne Bartlett. I got to know women composers like Thea Musgrave and Pauline Oliveros."[120] By drawing upon these figures in her early compositions, Larsen found a natural voice with which to write. In many ways, there was no decision to incorporate women's voices in her music. It was an unconscious beginning, based on this community she was building for her early compositions.[121] She began composing symphonic works, as well as songs. She drew upon standard poems in the beginning, allowing the strength of the poet to lend a foundation for what she wanted to do musically.[122] It was around this time that Larsen was pursuing her doctorate, and studying under Dominick Argento. Upon graduation, Larsen began looking for work and deciding what she wanted to do, and perhaps even more so, what she wanted to say in her music.

Larsen's first major commission came from Thea Ingleson, who requested a song cycle for clarinet, piano and voice. Due to her already professed affinity for Georgia O'Keeffe, Larsen suggested the painter as a character for the cycle. The song cycle was

[120] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

composed, but unfortunately, Larsen was denied the use of Georgia O'Keeffe's own words by the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.[123] The cycle has since been transposed for viola, clarinet and piano, and is titled *Black Birds, Red Hills.* This work holds importance because it was the first work upon which people began to draw a correlation between Larsen and an affinity for female characters. Following the composition of *Black Birds, Red Hills*, Larsen found herself conducting master classes and pursuing residences at various colleges. It was at one of these first colleges where she was first asked to lead a discussion about her affinity for texts about women. Her response was thus:

> I initially thought, "What? I have an affinity?" It turns out I do. I am a woman. The texts that women write to represent themselves, whether prose or poetry, tend to be authentic, honest, and direct. Men tend to distance themselves from the emotion of the text by creating a frame. With texts written by men, the speaker is almost always a universal being whereas with women it's much more common to have a concrete, personal speaker. You can also see this in their personal interactions. When men get emotional, they pat each other on the back. Women (with exceptions) generally will just sit down and talk to each other.[124]

The idea of emotional framing is an interesting one to consider musically. When a man writes for the female voice, there is a bit of distance between himself and the voice for which he is writing. It is only natural: a man doesn't have the same connection to a female voice or female experiences as women do. When a woman writes about a female character, for a female voice, there may be a closer connection between composer, character and singer. Possibly this may be what Larsen is referring to in her discussion of male versus female centric texts. Of course, the reverse of this idea may hold true for women writing about men, and for men.

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[123] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[124] Ibid.

This aspect of male versus female texts is at the heart of her proclaimed affinity for female characters. In her writing, she is consistently working to stay true to that attraction. A positive outcome of this affinity was Larsen's commitment to expand the repertoire for the female voice. By choosing the words of women themselves, Larsen saw the opportunity for female singers to embody lived characters. "I started thinking about actively seeking texts with this kind of poetic 'authenticity,' texts where the author is making a strong statement from the self. I found I wanted to add to the repertoire for female voice by pursuing this and allowing the singer to become the speaker of the text.[125] One of the frequently employed methods for finding such "poetic authenticity" would come in Larsen's choice of using real women's words for song texts. Her use of real women's words is exactly what draws the listener in when experiencing many of Larsen's song cycles, and also what allows the singer to dramatically and musically embody a particular historical character. This is particularly the case *Songs from Letters* and *Try Me, Good King: The Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII.* In discussing this affinity for female characters in her songwriting, Larsen illuminates her own connections to feminism.

> I think that my connection to feminism, as I look back to where it started and where I am, was that I decided that the best thing I could do was to live a life of constant public display of the products of my brain. I wanted to work with great performers who perform for audiences of people dedicated to listening. The strongest thing I could do was to never ask permission but to just do it. The greatest lessons I learned as part of the second wave of feminism were the importance of equal pay and to never ask permission. Once you stop asking permission from the system, you are free.[126]

[125] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[126] Ibid.

Larsen's opinion on feminism as related to her work provides a perfect glimpse into what drives her music making. Feminism allowed Larsen to pursue the music she desired to make. In that process, she discovered her affection for authentic female voices and expressed that affection by drawing on the literal words of those female characters. That utilization of true women's words saw a two-fold result in her music: further originality and authentication of her works and contributions to the art song repertoire for women. By not asking permission, Larsen discovered the freedom that is central to her compositional style. Following this discussion of feminism as related to her work, the conversation shifts to questions about women as a minority in music composition. When asked how Larsen copes with this simple fact, her answer was simple. "I let go of trying to prove myself. I didn't enter any competitions. Why? Because it is asking for permission and approval. I just do my work."[127] By making her own music on her terms and never asking permission, Larsen's music serves as a model of female empowerment in a field that otherwise has tended to be dominated by men.

These questions of women in the musical world and the disparity of such in history are questions that have been posed to Larsen by many musical scholars and critics. On February 22 2013, Larsen conducted an interview on the Minnesota Public Radio as part of their Westminster Town Hall Forum entitled "What you Hear is what you Get: A Composer on Composing." She received a question about women in music that inquired how female voices and minds have impacted the genre of classical music. Her response stated that since the 1940s, composers have begun to understand the business, coming up with fresh ideas and fresh music. These composers include

[127] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

numerous fine examples of women composers. "We are supporting each other and all the composers out there. The living composers and the women composers."[128] Subsequently, Larsen was asked about her experiences regarding bias against women in her field.

> [Bias] usually comes in the form of benign neglect. I very joyfully try to change the idea that women aren't there. It takes a great deal of knowledge and humor to change the mind that there aren't any good works by women. The fact is, there are many of us who are working, and it is very fine music.[129]

Larsen's words about bias and female experiences in music expose optimism as well as a desire for change. In many ways, Larsen falls into line with other female composers of American history like Marion Bauer, viewing the term "woman composer" as a label that lifts women up and allows them support and community in music making rather than as a condemnation.

In this interview, Libby Larsen discussed her experiences within music through the lens of feminism. The two most prominent ideas she expressed were the concept of refusing to ask permission and her professed optimism for women in music. This optimism toward women making music is one that, much like her refusal to ask permission, shapes her musical style. Her music shares energy and a positive spirit that is connected to the optimism and empowerment she expresses in these conversations about feminism and music making. This interview with Larsen exposed a major lesson in the important conversation about women in music: the idea of simply doing. Following in the path of second wave feminists, Larsen entered the musical world making her music and never asking anyone if she could.[130] While the decision to set women's voices in her

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[128] Libby Larsen, Interview by Timothy D. Hart-Andersen, 22 February 2013, Minnesota Public Radio, Minneapolis, MN.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

writing may not have been a conscious one in the beginning, she gradually came to realize that it was in the women's voice that she would find the most authentic inspiration for her song. Inspiration, originality and authenticity in her musical writing, along with a detailed discussion of Larsen's highly professed affinity for text setting will be further examined in following chapter where the content of my interview with the composer moved to a focused conversation about her music.

Chapter 6: Regarding Music

Libby Larsen shows a distinctive affinity for the qualities of text, color, and drama in her music. All of her compositions, regardless of genre (symphonic, choral, chamber, vocal, etc.) display these qualities. In her song compositions, Larsen creates a sense of adventure and exploration. This is so strongly the case in her songs because she is very much determined to let the text of her music take the lead. She is particularly drawn to using fresh and original sound combinations to express the text she is setting.[131] Larsen is keen to acknowledge the many composers, musicians, poets and historical figures that influence her compositional style. Carol Kimball discusses a few of Larsen's strongest influences on her setting of language in her *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*. Three such influential twentieth-century composers and their respective works include Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine,* Berg's *Wozzeck*, and Schoenberg's *Erwartung.* Regarding these particular pieces, Larsen states:

> There are two things that these three works inspired in me. First, the composers' choice of texts, the texts being personal, passionate and dramatic. Each text is exploring emotion, the emotion of desperation in *La Voix Humaine*, the anticipation of disaster in *Erwartung* and the shared, internal, expressionistic journey of Wozzeck and Marie. The second influence was the use of time, especially how fluid time becomes when one is inextricably embroiled in an emotional flow.[132]

In the melodic and rhythmic fluidity of her music, Larsen shows a striking affinity for color and drama. In this quote from Larsen, she describes the aspects of twentieth-century vocal writing that made a deep impact on her own compositional process, and her attention to emotional exploration within tonality and traditional harmonic flow. Other composers affected her writing, and particularly her setting of text. One such composer

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[131] Kimball, 294.
[132] Ibid.

she claims is Ned Rorem. "I liked Ned Rorem's work because of the natural way he sets the English language. It is the pre-WWII English that surrounded him. It is American English, but not the American English we speak. It was influenced by Western European syntax and flow. I felt that Ned Rorem's music flowed directly from the American English texts he set."[133] Syntax is a major component of how language is felt and communicated in her writing, particularly as it is related to the way American language flows (whether in more vernacular and idiomatic settings or more formal settings). Naturally, her teacher Argento stands as a major influence on Larsen, although not so much in his approach to text setting. Argento stood more as a model that Larsen could "run up against." Larsen studied all of his songs and often asked herself "If I'm not that, what am I? That is important."[134]

Any musician who has studied Larsen's music in greater or lesser depth should be aware of her respect for the music of popular musicians as well. She hails Chuck Berry, Big Mama Thorton, Bessie Smith and Little Richard as "authentic song writers" who have always held her interest.[135] While all these composers have the blues tradition in common, that is not the primary factor that captures Larsen's attention. Rather, it is their treatment of language. "It is because their lyrics are in American English, English influenced by a hodgepodge of East African and Western European syntax and flow.[136] Similarly, Larsen acknowledges rock and roll musicians who have affected her treatment of text. For example, the lyrics of The Who and Chicago particularly fascinate her, largely in the fact that these rock musicians reflect "authentic American music that grows

[133] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

from the language."[137] This respect for the American language and vernacular is perhaps Larsen's primary concern in her vocal writing. Our discussion in the interview of her respect for American English brought up another interesting opinion of Larsen's regarding singers in America and the way Americans view vocal pedagogy.

> The more I worked with American English texts, the more frustrated I became with the world of vocal pedagogy. Proper vocal technique is designed to prepare you to sing repertoire with texts that are not in American English. If we are looking to form good singing habits, we ought to be able to develop vocal technique that naturally facilitates singing in our own vernacular.[138]

The above quotation highlights the ways in which Larsen asks difficult questions and challenges the systems that have gripped classical music for so long. For Larsen, the words are at the heart of any music that is sung. So naturally, she is drawn to her native language as the primary source for texts. By letting the words take the lead, Larsen finds that the music organically comes to her.

> When I set text, my first draft is free of meters because I want to stay true to the flow of the words…I am drawn to great artists who express themselves in American forms, like hip-hop, gospel, early country western and blues. This is where I find words and music become something new and can no longer be separated from each other.[139]

Larsen's musical and textual originality and flair for language is one reason why song composition is such a major component of her oeuvre.

While song is a large part of her output, she has also composed symphonies, chamber works, opera and choral pieces. For Larsen, the compositional process works quite differently when writing for the voice in contrast to other instruments. She composes for the instrument at hand and hears the full orchestration in her mind before

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[137] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid

she sets down the notes on the page.[140] To this end, she does find a certain amount of subtext in her instrumental writing. She claims scatting as one method for getting her ideas for instrumental motives out of her mind and onto the page.

> If you write scat for the violin, you have something new. "Holy Roller" [1997, for saxophone and piano] is an example of this. That piece is influenced by revivalist preaching. The saxophone part uses the whole instrument, inflecting it with revivalist preaching techniques: tempo stretching, range, and jumping into falsetto, etc. That piece is entirely text influenced, but there isn't a word in it and you could never sing it.[141]

Again, her affinity for the human voice underlies her musical writing for instrumental and vocal forces. Larsen enjoys creating a challenge in her music. But, the challenge is different in her instrumental works in contrast to her vocal works. In her instrumental writing, she writes to challenge the capacities instrument itself. In her vocal works rather, she challenges the singer, not the voice. "If I were to challenge the [vocal] instrument itself, I would ask for vocal fry, pops and clicks, and all sorts of other things that the voice can do naturally but is not part of our vocal pedagogy."[142] This subtle difference shows her understanding of the vocal instrument and its abilities as well as its limits.

Larsen is quick to advise when asked about performing her music and interpreting her texts. One concept that she must continually coach out of singers is the idea that as the vocal line rises, so does the dynamic.

> This is a Romantic performance practice which does not necessarily apply to music of our times. If a singer uses this Romantic technique where it is not called for, in my music, it may actually change the meaning of the words. The music comes from the words. If the singer has thought carefully about the text from the

[140] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

> standpoint of meaning, the singer will avoid an interpretation informed by standard repertoire.[143]

To this end, this practice of looking to the text for dynamic and expressive clues allows the singer to bring their own performance interpretations to the piece. A singer thus will find more opportunities for nuance, expression and vocal color.

Regarding the singing of her vocal compositions, Larsen gives three firm pieces of advice. The first is to prepare one's ear. "I am very careful about giving references to pitch, but not in the obvious ways. And so you need to be prepared to relate linearly to the music in order to feel secure about pitches."[144] Larsen's pitch references are often not supported vertically by accompanying chords, and it is critical for a singer to understand this, lest they feel uneasy and uncertain about where their part lies in the overall music. Her second piece of advice is simply to practice consonants. Given her love and affection for American language, this makes perfect sense. "Practice your consonants and be prepare to use them. Enunciate!"[145] Consonants and the quality of words themselves work their way in the overall musical effect of her vocal works. As stated previously, Larsen often does not give a lot of hints toward dynamics in her songs. By paying special attention to the words and consonants, a singer will find clues to the dynamic necessities of certain passages. And finally, her last piece of advice when preparing her songs is the idea of stamina. "Practice your stamina, pacing yourself as you sing. In my later works, you really have to pace yourself."[146] She acknowledges the need for stamina and that this requirement (particularly in her later works) puts her songs at a graduate or professional

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[143] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

singing level. Each of these maxims of her advice proves critical in preparing Larsen's songs for performance. Central to such preparation is a firm and comprehensive understanding of her treatment of text.

The following two chapters single out two specific song cycles of Libby Larsen: *Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey, 1880-1902* and *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII.* The following analyses will discuss the historical aspects of these real life characters as well as multiple examples of motives, dramatic pacing and Larsen's text setting techniques. In the discussion of *Songs from Letters* in the next chapter, I specifically outline Larsen's techniques of character development, focusing particularly on her musical treatment of the contrasting characteristics of Calamity Jane, and how this treatment affects the vocal pacing of the cycle for the performer. The concepts of repetition and musical return and their importance as motivic and psychological tools will also be outlined in detail. And finally, the specific motives frequently utilized by Larsen will be highlighted, particularly her use of tritones and bell-tolls (motivic elements that are also prominent in *Try Me, Good King*).

PART THREE: A DISCUSSION OF TWO SONG CYCLES

Chapter 7: *Songs From Letters: Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey, 1880-1902*

Libby Larsen's compositions encompass all of the major forms and structures. From large instrumental symphonies to chamber works, from choral pieces to opera, Larsen expresses her individuality and her flair for Americana in each work she composes. But, it is in art song where her real affinity for both Americana and strong female characters can be fully recognized. *Songs From Letters* was the first composition where Larsen became fully aware of her interest in setting the voices of strong female characters. Though Larsen's early song cycle *Cowboy Songs* (1979) shows a glimpse into the composer's growing commitment to female voice and character (and Larsen credits this cycle), it wasn't until she was immersed the world of Calamity Jane that she consciously recognized her love for setting the female voice.[147] Musically, in this cycle Larsen's use of motives connects musical elements to emotional and physical ideas in the text. The most critical aspect of Larsen's musical writing is her use of repetition. Larsen's use of repetition has musical, psychological and dramatic significance, a concept to be discussed in depth and specificity in the following pages.

Songs From Letters: Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey, 1880-1902 was a commission by Mary Elizabeth Poore. Poore gave the premiere performance of the cycle at Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall in New York City on April 8, 1989. The cycle is scored for soprano voice and piano or chamber ensemble (including flute, clarinet, piano, strings and percussion). The text is based on the diary of Martha Jane Canary Hickok, otherwise known as Calamity Jane. Larsen states about the composition that it "reveals

[147] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

the struggle of an individual soul, a tender soul, a woman and a pioneer on many frontiers."[148] The character of Calamity Jane represents a woman who was working in a world of men, and who worked at what she loved. At the heart of the words of Calamity Jane is the love she felt for her daughter Janey, her daughter with Wild Bill Hickok. To support herself and her daughter (whom she sent to live with her friend Jim O'Neill, Janey's "normal daddy"), Jane worked as a gambler, trick shooter, cowhand, barmaid and a stagecoach driver, among other pursuits.[149] Larsen's interest in Calamity Jane is twofold. "In her time, she was odd and lonely. One hundred years later, her life sheds light on contemporary society… I'm interested in that rough-toughness and in Calamity Jane's struggle to explain herself honestly to her daughter, Janey.[150] Larsen is curious both about Jane's position as a woman in a male driven world and in her efforts of balancing her own life and interests with her role as a mother. These ideas are as prevalent in today's society; they engage changing gender roles and the topic of feminism in American history.

It was Karen Payne's book *Between Ourselves*, a compilation of letters throughout history written between mothers and daughters, where Larsen first found her inspiration to write *Songs From Letters.* "I was reading a book of letters to daughters [*Between Ourselves*, Payne], and the inspiration for *Songs and Letters* just leapt off the

[148] *Libby Larsen Website* [website online]; http://libbylarsen.com/index.php?contentID=241&profileID=1220&startRange=; Internet; accessed 23 April 2013.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

page. They are great words."[151] The question of the authenticity of the words of Calamity Jane is one of frequent debate among scholars. The understanding is that the letters Jane wrote to her daughter Janey were never sent to her, but rather given to her as a diary after her mother's death. The final letter is dated 1902, just a year before Jane's death. This fact is one reason principal biographers disagree about whether the letters and the diary from which they come are truly from Jane's hand.[152] Larsen is aware of this discrepancy, but does not consider it of much merit regarding her own composition. "Scholarly evidence suggests Calamity Jane might not have written those words. But, it doesn't really matter; it is a real person and a real character."[153] It is the character and the real person that drew Larsen's interest. The words (whether truly Calamity Jane's or not) inspire the music, and this text-driven approach to writing is a hallmark of Larsen's vocal works.

To depict the Old West is not something new or unique to composers, poets, writers, or other artists. Larsen chooses to share her depiction from a female perspective, creating a new and fresh approach to a mythology of the West.[154] Calamity Jane was a woman trying to make it in a man's world. The experiences as felt by Calamity Jane hold many similarities to what the other women previously discussed had experienced in their

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[151] *Libby Larsen Website* [website online]; http://libbylarsen.com/index.php?contentID=241&profileID=1220&startRange=; Internet; accessed 23 April 2013.

[152] Rosemary N. Killam, "Calamity Jane: Strength, Uncertainty, and Affirmation," *Women of Note Quarterly: The Magazine of Historical and Contemporary Women Composers* 1, no. 3 (1993): 18.

[153] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

[154] Glenda Denise Secrest, "'Songs from Letters' and 'Cowboy Songs' by Libby Larsen: Two Different Approaches to Western Mythology and Western Mythological Figures,"*Journal of Singing – The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 64, no. 1 (2007): 21.

lives. The American female composers of our past, as discussed in previous chapters, had to conquer obstacles of lack of education, opportunity and ideological gender roles to live the lives they wished and to compose the music they desired. Larsen herself encountered many of these obstacles in her career. It is interesting that regardless of the career field a woman wished to pursue, they grappled with the same difficulties of gender expectations. Be it composing music or trick shooting, women simply had to fight for their place among the men. Fortunately for Martha Jane Canary, her upbringing allowed her enough courage and strength for such a fight.

According to some accounts, Jane was drinking whiskey at age thirteen and was self-sufficient at age fifteen when her parents died. Perhaps because of these circumstances Jane was not confined by the typical lady-like behavior of the time. Rather, she was an independent female, dressing like a man in trousers and working with men in exciting jobs (for example, laying tracks for the first national railroad).[155] The traditional domestic roles for women at that time, such as cooking and washing, were not in Jane's character. The most famous of her many jobs was her position as a performer in Bill Cody's Wild West Show, contrary to the typical female roles of the day. Regardless of taking on these masculine jobs, her character was actually quite tender and nurturing. She was known to take children into her home and often nurtured both children and adults in time of illness.[156]

The character of Calamity Jane is multi-faceted and suggests the kind of complex, strong character that Larsen aimed to pursue in her song settings. As a song cycle, *Songs from Letters* leads the listener through various stages of Calamity Jane's life. The listener

[155] Secrest, 23.
[156] Ibid.

is allowed to experience this colorful dramatization of her character, including her warm and loving side in addition to her wild and rowdy personality.[157] The contrasts of tender and wild, loving and rowdy are perfectly reflected in the structure of the cycle. Movements 1, 3 and 5 are introverted and contemplative, expressing the tender side of Jane while movements 2 and 4 are more exciting and thrilling, suggesting Jane's flair for adventure and action. When performed *attacca* as written, these contrasting movements create a well-balanced cycle for soprano voice. The movements of the song cycle are as follows:

1. So Like Your Father's (1880) *Freely, recitative*
2. He Never Misses (1880) *With abandon*
3. A Man Can Love Two Women (1880) *Calmly*
4. A Working Woman (1882-1893) *Slowly, freely, recitative then jaunty*
5. All I Have (1902) *With flexibility throughout*

The five movements of the cycle feature the precise elements of contrast that encompassed the character of Calamity Jane. Larsen's organization of the songs as slow, fast, slow, fast, slow creates a dramatic trajectory that allows the performer to fully express the many facets of Jane's character. The symmetry and balance of this organization also provides an excellent vocal balance for the performer. In the more introverted and calm movements, the vocalist can show more intimacy and sensitivity in vocal color while the fast and rowdy movements allow for more vocal flair and power in their expression. Dramatically, a performer must consider each aspect of Jane's character independently and address these character features through specific vocal qualities. Vocal

[157] Secrest, 23.

pacing is an important consideration for the performer. As the cycle advances between movements, so does the emotional content of the text. It is important for the performer to follow the trajectory of the drama and ensure that she does not convey too much intensity early in the cycle.

The overall narrative of the cycle is a microcosm of Calamity Jane's life. There are sad and regretful memories, reflections about drama and violence and of course tender moments of love all present in the narrative of the cycle. This narrative is connected through musical motivic elements as well as Larsen's use of repetition. Repetition in this song cycle serves psychological, dramatic and musical significance. Dramatically, Larsen uses repetition and musical return as a metaphor for Jane's own memory. The texts of the songs are drawn from specific elements of Jane's memory. Musical returns at key moments in each song allow Larsen to connect the musical content to specific dramatic moments, and serve as symbols for Jane's own memories and reminiscences.

Another important aspect of the cycle lies in the text. As Larsen has frequently attested, the text is where she first begins in her compositional process, and from the text arises the music. *Songs From Letters* strictly employs prose pertaining to the nature of the letters and Jane's words. Larsen tends to prefer prose, due to its flexibility in the process of text setting. Prose in this case allows Larsen to create a sense of the natural flow of the words, enabling the listener to hear the music's portrayal of qualities of American vernacular idioms. The prose text also leads to a frequent use of recitative in the cycle, often without accompaniment. This absence of instrumental accompaniment highlights silence as the only accompaniment to the voice, an effective emotional device at points of

drama and sentiment in the cycle.[158] Almost all of the individual aspects of the music in *Songs From Letters* arise out of the text, including the development of the melodic lines. Larsen usually sets the melodic lines syllabically to mimic the organic rise and fall of American language. Word painting creates emotional effect in the music, often expressed through the use of both small and large leaps in the melody.[159]

One of the most unifying aspects of the cycle is Larsen's use of motives and motivic development. Her use of the motives connects directly to the emotional content of the words. One such motive that is pervasive in the cycle features tritones in different contexts, heightening the emotional dissonance of Jane's life. Larsen herself states, "The significance of the tritone is the metaphorical significance of being unsettled, being able to move in any direction."[160] Larsen utilizes the tritone compositionally in various ways, most often heard in moments of heightened emotion or tension. By featuring the tritone in vocal passages, the motive serves as a symbolic representation of the unsettled nature of Jane's life (Example 1). When the tritone appears in the piano accompaniment, it provides Larsen the harmonic freedom she requires to move the musical material in any direction that the text calls for. The tritone, as with Larsen's other motives, help create the outline of the cycle.

Motives in Larsen's musical writing are not always obvious. Frequently, the motives appear modified at higher pitch levels, creating the feeling of growing suspense at moments of emotional agitation. The relationship of motives between voice and piano are also central to a singer's understanding of the music and the motivic development.

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[158] Secrest, 22.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Secrest, 23.

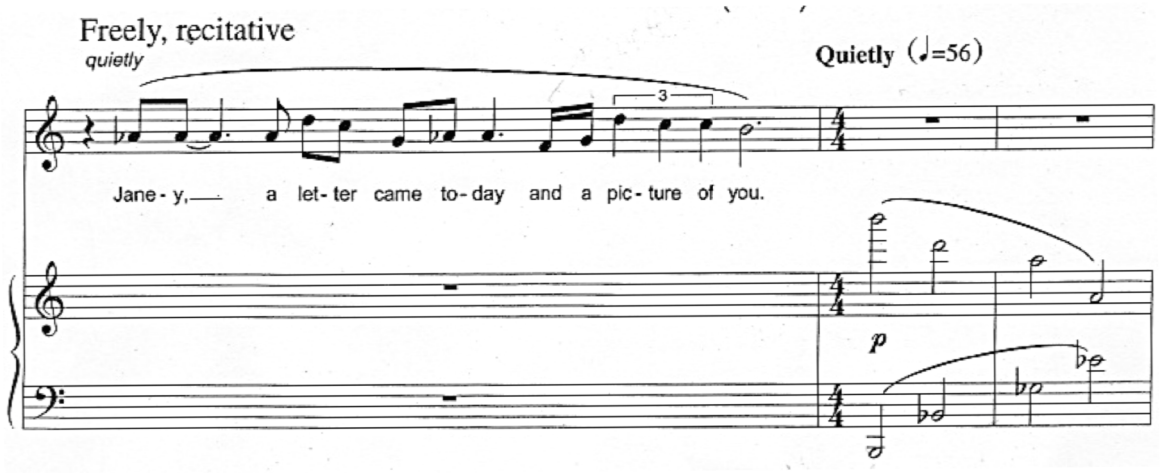
"Motivic unification alternates between voice and piano as Larsen begins the melody in the vocal line then shifts the remainder of the melodic line to the piano, allowing the piano to 'sing' the text."[161] Another prime motivic example is the bell motive (Example 2) heard at both the beginning of the cycle and at then end, serving as a motivic frame for the cycle. Interestingly, the bell motive returns in Larsen's *Try Me Good King: The Last Words of the Wives of Henry VII,* as outlined in the following chapter.

Larsen's use of rhythm derives from the flow of the text. The cycle features many changes of meter, allowing Larsen freely to accentuate and articulate the organic movement and musical character of the words. At times in the cycle, there is no time signature whatsoever, creating even more freedom for the effortless flow of the text. Regarding tonality, Larsen does not find herself too tightly confined to traditional harmony. The basic tonal material usually derives from diatonic scales with a freer treatment of dissonance that deviates from traditional choral progressions to highlight the text.[162] Related to her elimination of time signature, Larsen omits key signatures and projects a freer treatment of harmonic movement. While the cycle is often without a strong tonal center, as the work comes to its resolution, so does the tonality. The tension slowly builds in the final movement, both harmonically and emotionally until Jane finally asks for forgiveness and says goodnight to her daughter. The quiet and warm expression of goodnight is followed by the final use of the bell motive and a return to the tonal center.

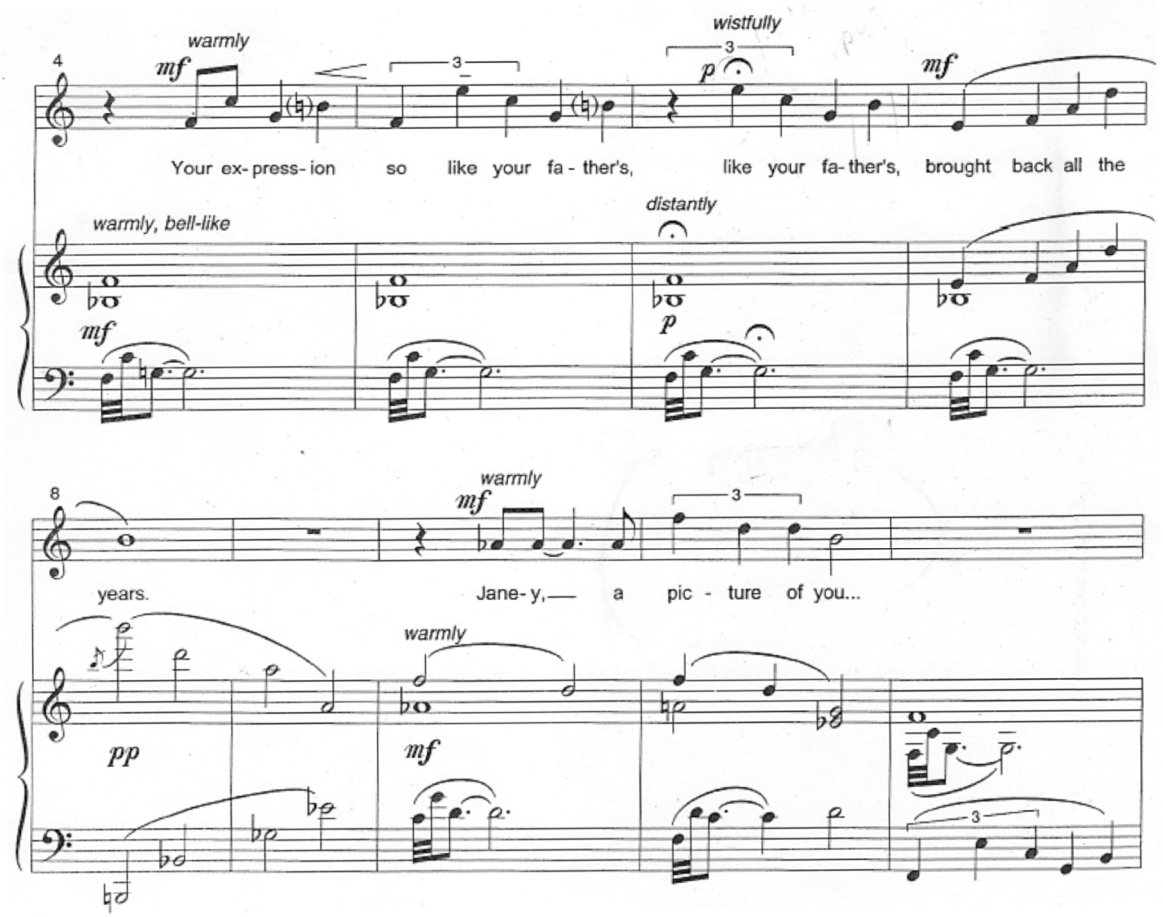
The text of the first song of the cycle, "So Like Your Father's," dated from 1880, recalls Jane's emotions after receiving a photo of her daughter. Upon receiving this

[161] Secrest, 23.
[162] Ibid., 22.

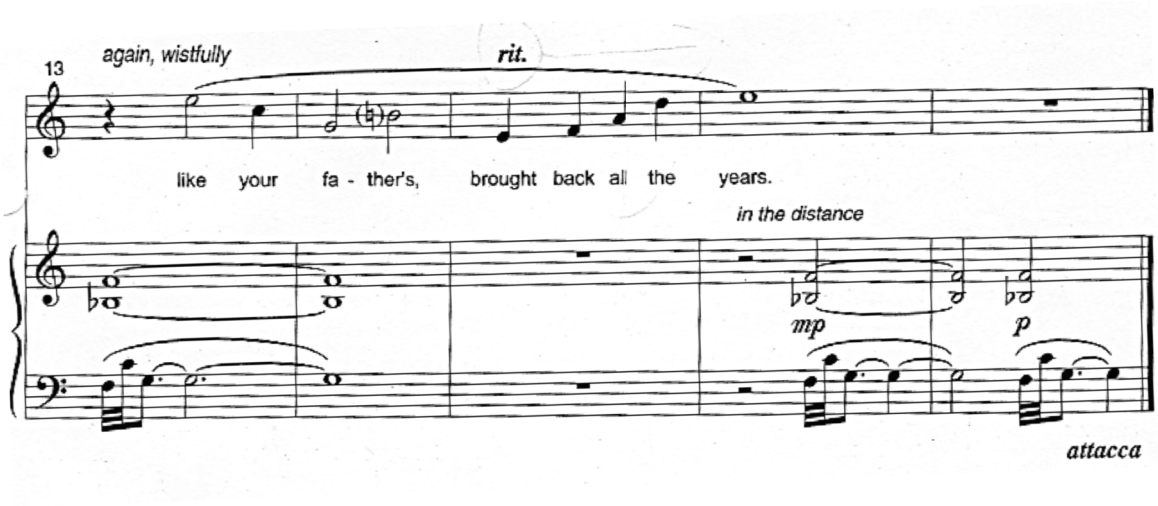
photo, Jane reflects upon the past. These reflections inspired Larsen to treat this first movement in a more introspective and contemplative musical manner. The vocal line is reminiscent of recitative with an unaccompanied presentation of the melodic material in m. 1. This is Larsen's first example of utilizing silence in the accompaniment to the voice, enhancing the emotion and solitude that Jane feels. Larsen has annotated the vocal line as *quietly,* lending a hint at the quality of Jane's character in this moment. Vocally, the singer should utilize a quiet dynamic, symbolizing the distance that Jane is feeling from her daughter. The quiet vocal line coupled with the silence in the piano part symbolizes Jane's isolation and loneliness in her recollections. The cycle's first melodic tritone motive appears in the vocal line "Janey, a letter came today" in the very first leap the voice sings (Example 1). Similarly in the piano, the initial piano motive is heard expressing contrary motion in four octaves, and ending with another harmonic tritone motive (also shown in Example 1). The tritone in these first instances symbolizes the discord and unrest that Jane is experiencing in her life. In the following measure, the first bell motive is heard in the piano accompaniment (Example 2). First heard here in m. 4, the bell motive will recur throughout the cycle and particularly at the end in the final movement "All I Have," creating a psychological conclusion for the ear (Examples 3 and 4). This use of similar motives by Larsen to begin and end the cycle heightens the psychological connection and emotional journey undertaken in the cycle.



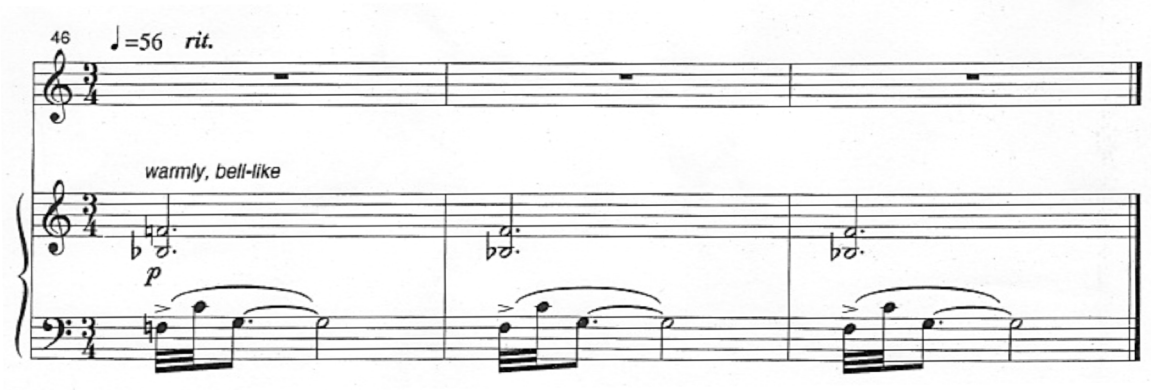
Example 1. Larsen, "So Like Your Father's," mm. 1–2. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 2. Larsen, "So Like Your Father's," mm. 4–12. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



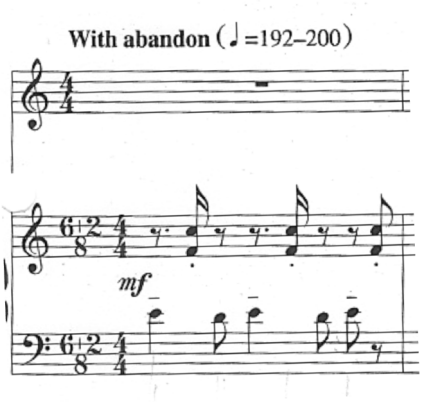
Example 3. Larsen, "So Like Your Father's," mm. 13–17. © Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 4. Larsen, "All I Have," mm. 46–48. © Oxford University Press; used with permission.

Examples 2, 3 and 4 are prime examples of Larsen's use of repetition to psychological and dramatic effect. Example 2 (mm. 4–8) highlights Jane's own memories with the text "Your expression so like your father's, like your father's, brought back all the years." The repetition mechanism is twofold in this example. Larsen repeats the text "like your father's" to express the nostalgic emotion that Jane is feeling. She then brings back that same musical and textual material in Example 3 mm. 13–17, again repeating "Like your father's, brought back all the years." Jane's words are reflecting her personal memories by saying that her picture "brought back all the years" and Larsen further

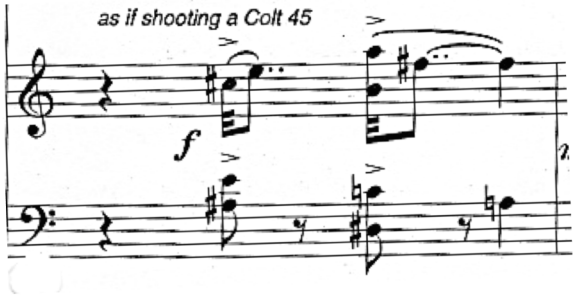
symbolizes this reflection by the return of the musical material. In this instance, repetition serves as a symbol for Jane's memory, creating a dramatic subtext that allows the listener to connect both emotionally and aurally to the music and the narrative. Finally, Example 4 (which falls at the end of the song cycle) displays another type of musical return, in this case, symbolizing the resolution of the text and the end of Jane's reminiscences. By bringing back the bell-toll motive from Example 1, Larsen utilizes repetition to create a psychological effect, framing the cycle and symbolizing closure and resignation for Jane.



Example 5. Larsen, "He Never Misses," m. 1. © Oxford University Press; used with permission.

The second movement of the cycle, "He Never Misses (1880)," displays the extroverted and thrill-seeking aspects of Jane's character. The song is an action-packed memory of the characterization Janey's father, Wild Bill Hickok. The rhythmic metric articulations of the voice settle into a consistent 4/4, in contrast to the 6/2 eighth-note patterning of the piano accompaniment. Several motives are heard including the motive of galloping horse hooves (Example 5) and the gunshot (Example 6). These motives are symbolic of both the sounds that associate with Jane's life and also the specific persona

of Wild Bill Hickok. The gunshot is illustrated with a thirty-second note directly followed by a double dotted eighth note, initially sounding defiant and quick, much like

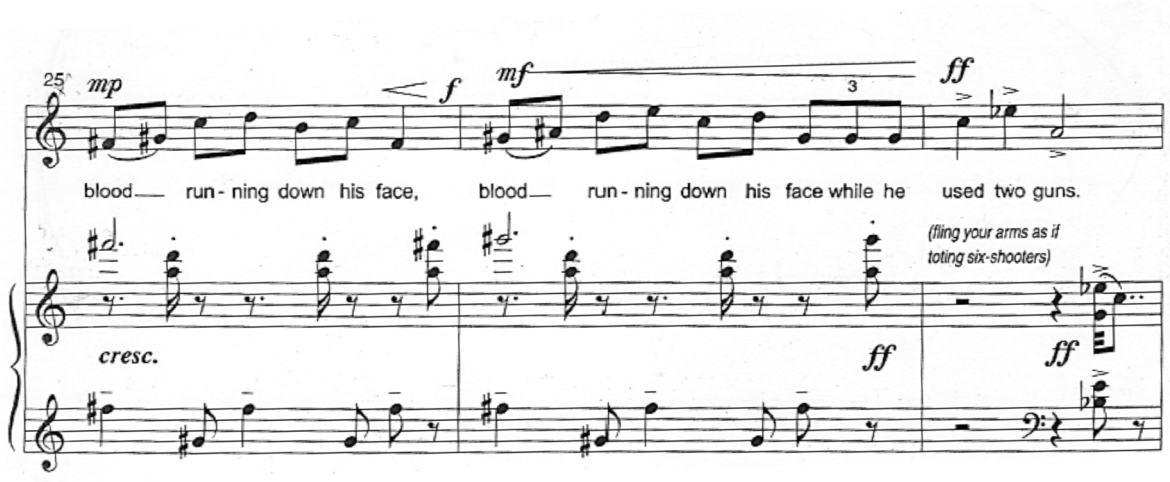


Example 6. Larsen, "He Never Misses," m. 4.

the sound of a Colt 45. The galloping hooves motive in Example 5 and the gunshot motive of Example 6 alternate repeatedly, which creates an aural connection to the action expressed in the text. The alternation of these motives begins to create a sense of suspense in relation to the longer lines of the voice. This second song of the cycle also depicts some of the finest examples of Larsen's use of text repetition to illustrate moments of suspense, heightened emotion, and tension. As Jane describes a particularly harrowing gunfight between Bill and a "bunch of outlaws," the tension rises as she describes her turning to warn him. Larsen repeats "The blood running down his face" at a higher pitch level, symbolizing the hysteria and thrill Jane felt (Example 7). Vocally, the performer could use a brighter and more pointed tone in this hysterical moment. This example also displays Larsen's keen use of dramatic cues to help the singer with expressing the emotion and action of the text (i.e. *fling your arms as if toting six-shooters*).

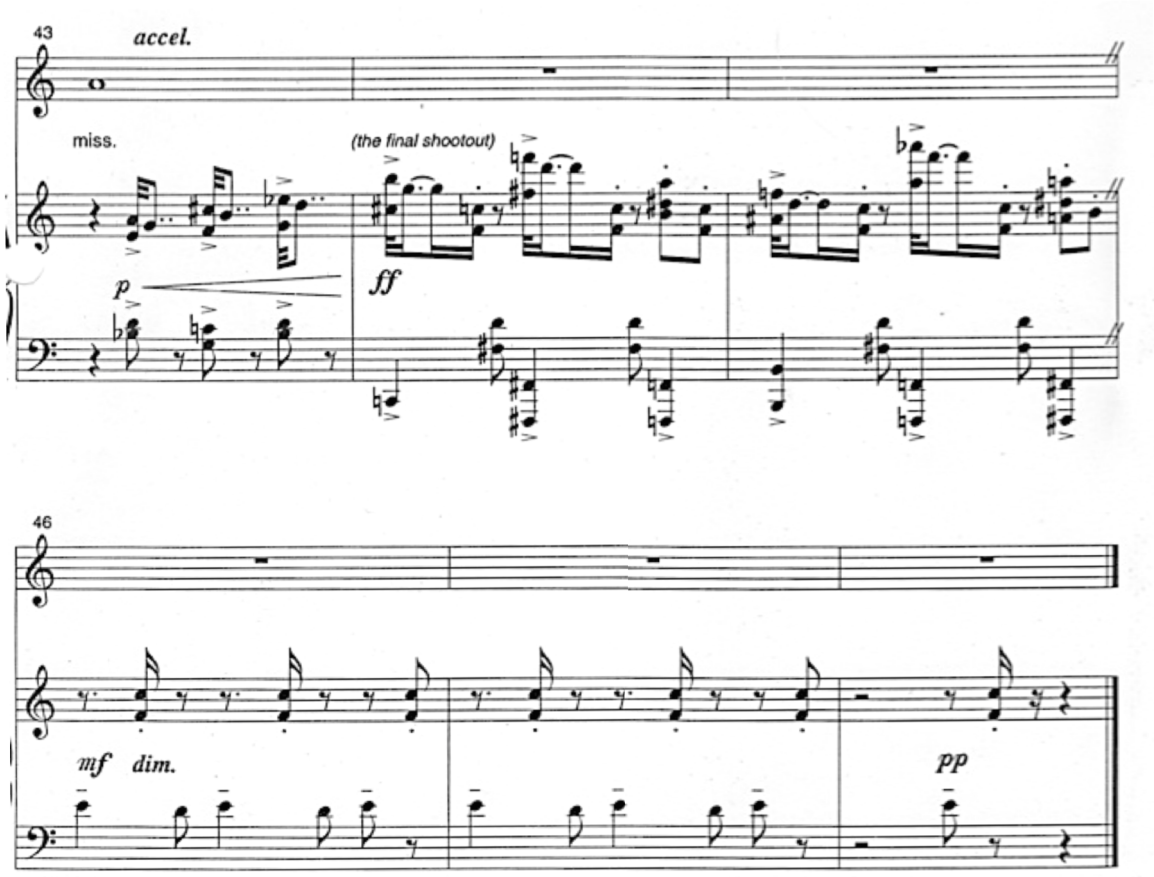
Larsen uses the idea of musical return in a different way in this second song of the cycle. In the first song, recurring text and melodic material enacts and symbolizes Jane's

reflections and memories (mm. 4–6, as seen in Example 2). The psychological effect felt by returning musical material is unique to each song, depending on where the return is heard (i.e. in the vocal or piano lines). For example, as the song draws to a close, the galloping hooves motive returns in the piano accompaniment to the end at mm. 44–48 (Example 8) described by Larsen as *the final shootout.* This return of the motive in the piano creates a dramatic effect, essentially finishing the story for Jane. Another example occurs in the repetition of "blood running down his face" (Example 7), where musical return again serves a symbolic purpose, illustrating the rising emotions, fear and adrenaline felt by Jane in that moment. By placing repetition in the vocal line, Larsen uses the mechanism to a symbolic effect. When seen in the piano accompaniment, repetition is heard for more dramatic purposes, lending more color and expression to the narrative. Larsen's use of musical repetition in these instances allows the listener to connect with the singer and accompany her in her emotional discord. As the ear is drawn to the repeated text and musical material, the heightened emotions are felt even more strongly.

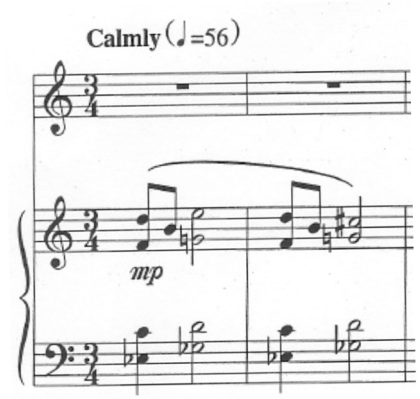


Example 7. Larsen, "He Never Misses," mm. 25–27. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

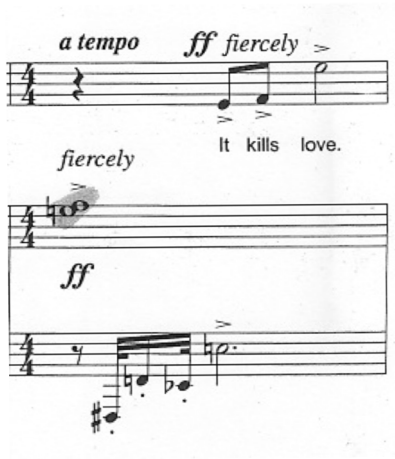
The third song of the cycle "A Man Can Love Two Women" is again introspective and reflective, displaying Jane's innermost thoughts about jealousy and how these suspicions affected her life and love. The song features different contrasting rhythmic-metric groups, quickly fluctuating between 3/4 at moments of calm and 4/4 at moments of anger and frustration. This alteration between calm and anger displays Larsen's keen understanding of psychological connection between musical form and text. When the time signature is 3/4, Larsen specifies *calmly* for the expression (Example 9). When the text and music get more frustrated, the time signature switches to 4/4 and Larsen changes the singer's affect to *fiercely* (Example 10). This connection between form and text provides another subtle layer to Larsen's depiction of Jane's conflicting emotions.



Example 8. Larsen, "He Never Misses," mm. 43–48. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

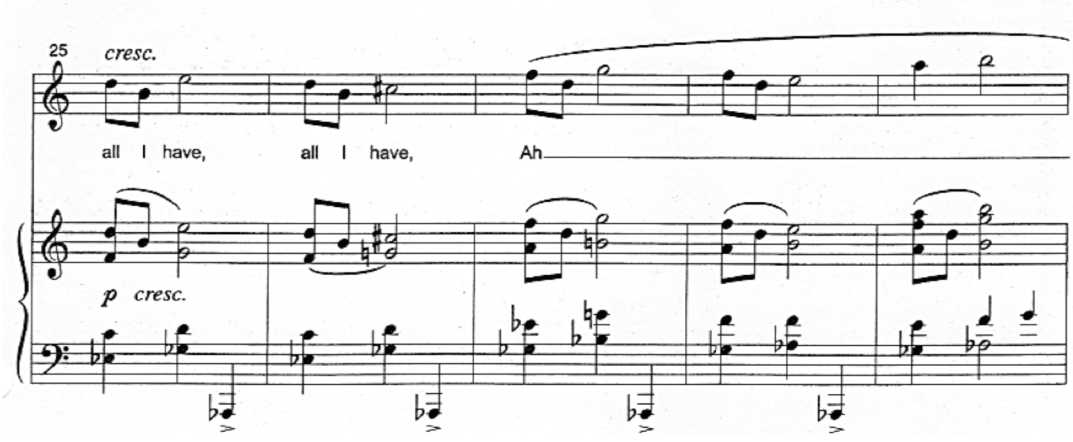


Example 9. Larsen, "A Man Can Love Two Women," mm. 1–2. © Oxford University Press; used with permission.



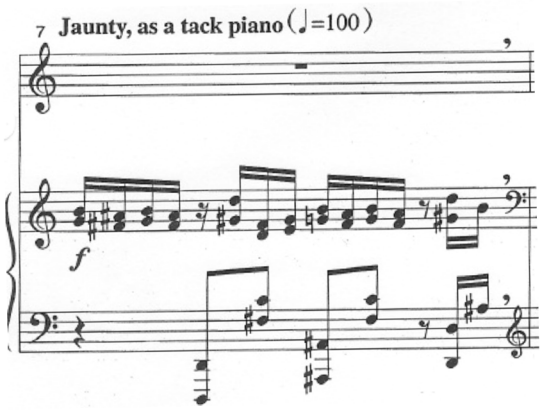
Example 10. Larsen, "A Man Can Love Two Women," m. 7. © 1889 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

Several musical motives occur in this third movement, along with examples of text repetition and intensification at higher pitch levels as shown in Example 7. The calm, rock-a-bye motive heard in the first two measures (Example 9) also returns in the final movement "All I Have" (Example 11). This motive features several linear and vertical tritones, lending more evidence to the unsettled nature of Jane in her recollections of her life. Heard in the first two measures of the third movement and again in the final four measures, this simple motive also serves as a motivic frame for the song. Again musical return creates a particular psychological effect. In Example 9, the motive is calm, symbolizing Jane's emotional disconnect from her former feelings of jealousy. These emotions eventually ruined her relationship with Janey's father. Larsen uses this motive calmly in the third song, illustrating that Jane has since let go of her jealously. But, in Example 11, the calm motive changes and is utilized in a more frantic matter, slowly building to an emotional climax as the vocal line rises in tessitura. In "All I Have," the motive is a metaphor for Jane's growing frustration that all she has left are her memories. By utilizing the same musical material in different ways, Larsen paints the strongly different emotions felt by Jane in these two moments.

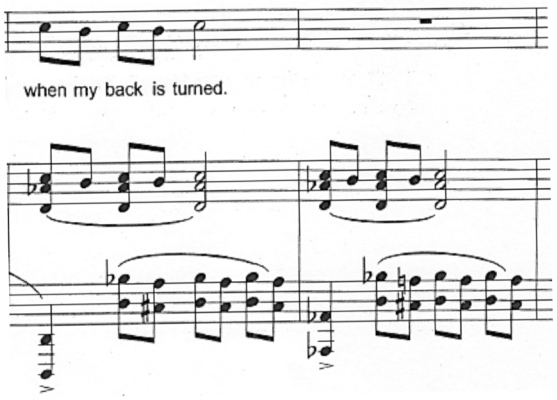


Example 11. Larsen, "All I Have," mm. 25–29. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

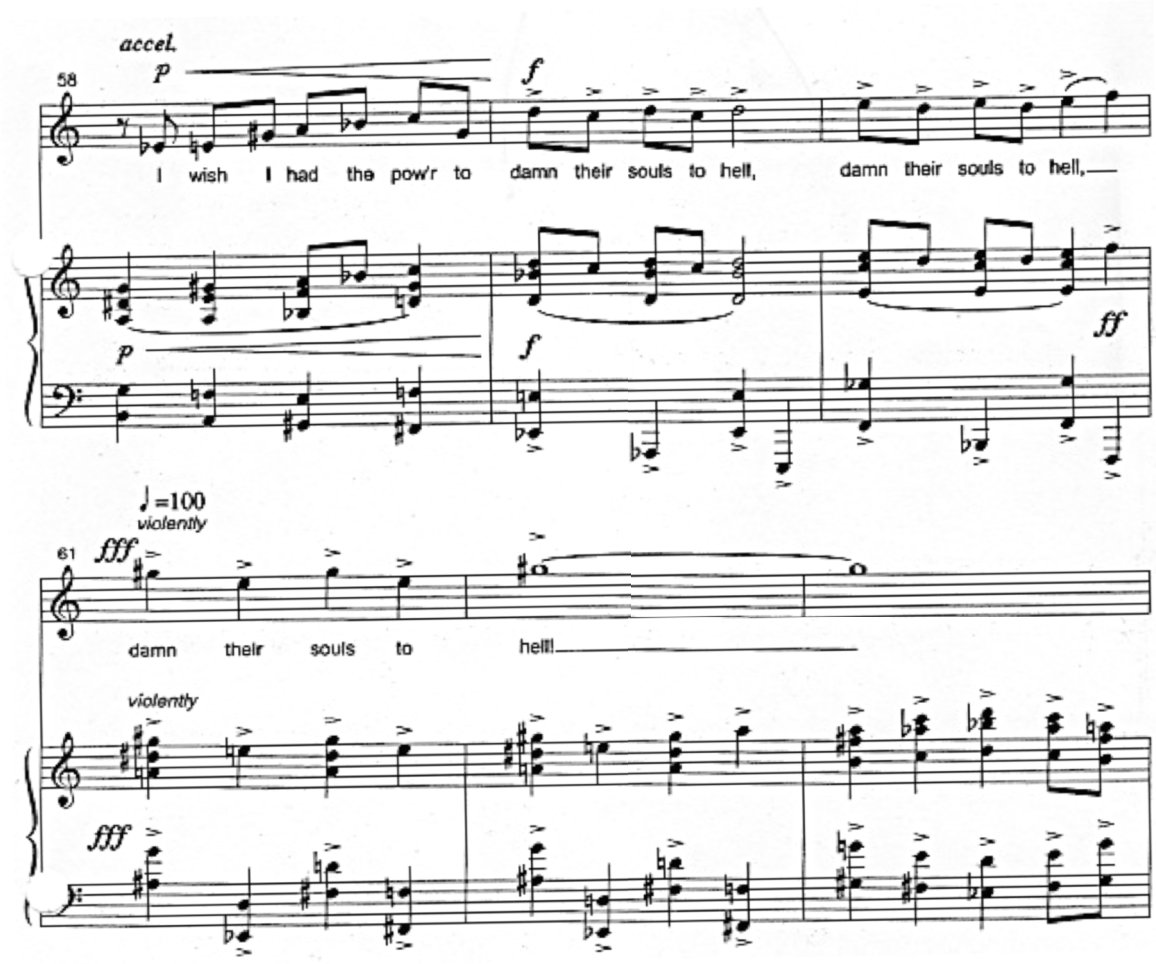
The fourth song of the cycle, "A Working Woman (1882-1893)," is another action-packed and extroverted dramatization of Jane's character. In the song, Jane describes each of her many jobs, as well as expressing some of the pitfalls of her "working woman" character as she experienced them. This fourth movement also displays more motives, including the "tacky" piano motive (Example 12), reminiscent of an out-of-tune saloon piano. This motive features major third intervals in sixteenth notes ending with a tritone and repeated. The motive is also heard in the vocal line "run me out of town" (m. 15) as well as in mm. 17, 18, 31, 35, 36 and in rhythmic augmentation in m. 52 on the vocal line "when my back is turned" (Example 13). The entire line states, "All the virtuous women have bastards and shotgun weddings. I have nursed them through childbirth and my only pay is a kick in the pants when my back is turned." Larsen slows the motive to eighth notes to express the bitterness and irony of Jane's betrayal by the women in the town.



Example 12. Larsen, "A Working Woman," m. 7. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used. with permission.



Example 13. Larsen, "A Working Woman," m. 51–52. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 14. Larsen, "A Working Woman," mm. 58–61. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

In this fourth song of the cycle, Larsen's use of repetition is again both a musical and a psychological tool. In mm. 59–61, she repeats the text "Damn their souls to hell" three times, quite intentionally (Example 14) and with rhetorical effect. Larsen: "When we want to make a point in advertising classes or if you take classes in emphasis, people will say 'three times.' It is just a cultural phenomenon, so I consciously use the repetition of three, with a variation in each one as a cultural tool."[163] By repeating the text three

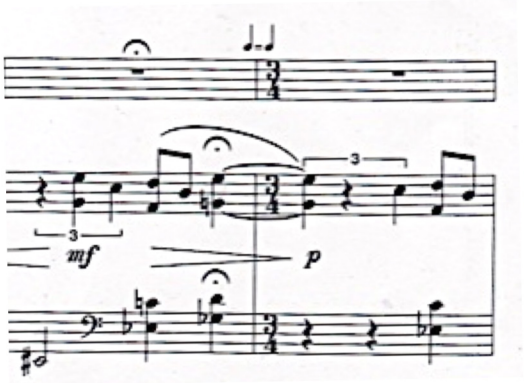
[163] Secrest, 25.

times, and by varying the pitch, rhythm and dynamics, Larsen accurately displays the more violent and aggravated nature of Jane. The dramatic impact of these variations allows a psychological connection to both the character and the musical depiction. With each repetition and each subtle variation (increased pitch level, rhythmic augmentation), Larsen creates a dramatic subtext. The restatements and returns of musical material are the psychological thread throughout each song and throughout the entire cycle. These repetitions at increased pitch level are the perfect opportunity for the performer to show their power in the cycle. In Example 14, the dynamic is triple *forte*, and the vocal line is settled on a G#5, a presumably comfortable note for a soprano to sing in full voice. Larsen's dramatic pacing of the fiery side of Jane's character has led to this moment. The singer's careful vocal pacing should reach a near peak, reserving just a bit of vocal power for the final movement of the cycle.

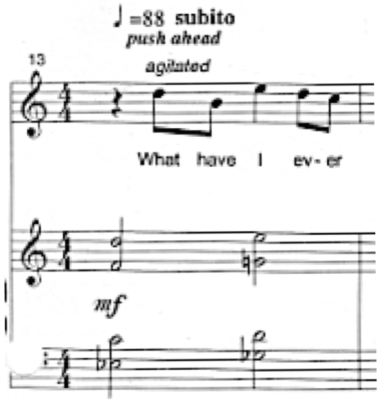
The final movement of the cycle, "All I Have," is also introverted and contemplative in the overall structure of the cycle. The text draws upon Jane's thoughts and wonderings about all she has left in her life and in the world. The final song of the cycle does not introduce any new motives, but rather repeats former motives to tie the whole cycle together. The motives as heard early in the cycle take on different connotations at the end of the cycle. One example of a returning motive with different dramatic role can be seen in Example 9, as mentioned previously in the discussion of "A Man Can Love Two Women." The 3/4 calm motive appears in Example 11 fragmented, along with a different bass line in the piano accompaniment. These motivic differences illustrate Jane's growing agitation as she realizes that all she has left in the world are just the pictures of Janey and Bill. This change in the piano accompaniment helps to further

the feelings of desperation that the motive suggests and represents. By changing the piano accompaniment from calm quarter notes and half notes to all quarter notes with an accent on the third beat, the exasperation and desperation is expressed in a way that elevates the drama for the listener. Larsen utilizes the bass line of the piano accompaniment as seen in Example 9 at other places in this fifth and final song of the cycle, including mm. 3–4 (Example 15) and m. 13 (Example 16), providing the listener with more musical repetition that connects them to music-expressive ideas presented earlier in the cycle. This simple piano bass line is another symbol for Jane's memories. Depending on how the motive is used, the connotation has different significance. In the case of Example 9 from "A Man Can Love Two Women," it symbolizes her memories of jealousy and her resignation. In Example 11, it symbolizes angst and frustration. In examples 15 and 16, the motive returns to portend the upcoming resolution to the narrative and Jane's acceptance of her life as it is. Each expression of the motive has a distinctive dramatic purpose for Larsen.

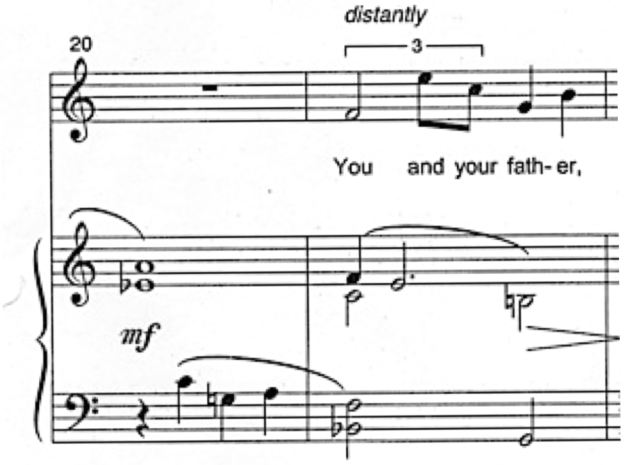
Two motives serve as the final frame and conclusion for the cycle. The first is the return of the initial memory motive seen in m. 7 of Example 2. In this final musical return, both the melodic material and a variation of the same text is restated, again symbolizing Jane's fond memories of her daughter and her daughter's father (Example 17). Larsen even marks this moment to be expressed *distantly*, as if Jane is lost in the moment of that memory.



Example 15. Larsen "All I Have," mm. 3–4. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 16. Larsen, "All I Have," m. 13. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 17. Larsen, "All I Have," m. 21. © 1989 Oxford University Press; used with Permission.

The second and final motive to return is the bell motive from Example 2. This return of musical material is shown previously in the discussion of Example 4. As the bell motive returns, so does a sense of tonality. This circular motivic effect brings closure both musically and emotionally to the cycle. The tonality returns in the final measures, drawing the psychological connection between the music and Jane's memories. Using the connections between music and memory, Larsen is careful to pace the drama of the

various contrasting characteristics of Jane. Dramatic pacing should also play a part in the performer's vocal pacing. Used in conjunction with Larsen's careful setting of text, the motives create the powerful sense of Jane's character and display the dramatic trajectory of her life over the course of the cycle. Reflecting on her own setting of text, Larsen states, "I do not 'set' words, instead, I try to create an environment for them to become even more active."[164] There are many ways Larsen goes about creating the environment for her words. Her use of motives and musical repetition are among her biggest tools for painting the environment for her characters. By repeating motives and musical material, Larsen creates a psychological connection between the character, the music and the listener. These psychological connections build the fabric of the music, creating the environment for the words to flourish. In this cycle *Songs From Letters*, Larsen depicts the world of "Old West America" where Calamity Jane spent her life. Expressing tenderness and violence, the words Larsen sets portray a female experience completely unique to Martha Jane Canary Hickok.

This discussion of *Songs from Letters* has considered particular features of Larsen's musical writing as psychological tools in dramatizing the character of Calamity Jane, including her use of motives, musical return and repetition and dramatic pacing. The following chapter on *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII,* begins with a brief historical context for each of the queens, and delves into specific aspects of the music as well as ideas for performance consideration. The main emphasis is on the concept of the "royal curse" as addressed through Larsen's dramatic pacing from each song to the next and on her choice and shaping of the text for each depiction.

[164] Killam, 22.

As in this chapter about *Songs from Letters*, certain musical motivic features of the cycle recur, including Larsen's use of lute songs, tritones and bell tolls as psychological tools and dramatic subtext. Finally, particulars regarding vocal color and pacing will be examined for each musical portrait, offering a distinctive interpretation of the characters and the cycle as a whole for a performer to consider.

Chapter 8: *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII*

Larsen's professed affinity for setting songs about the lives of strong female characters has no finer example than her song cycle *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII.* Commissioned by the Marilyn Horne Foundation, this spectacular song cycle for soprano voice and piano saw its premiere on January 19, 2001 at the Julliard Theatre in New York City featuring soprano Meagan Miller and pianist Brian Zeger. The cycle is a group of five songs whose texts are based on the letters and gallows speeches of five of the six wives of Henry VIII; Katherine of Aragon,[165] Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves and Katherine Howard.[166] Intentionally absent from the cycle is Henry VIII's sixth and final wife, Katherine Parr.[167] Larsen: "Henry's sixth wife, Katherine Parr, outlived him and brought some domestic and spiritual peace into Henry's immediate family. Although her written devotions are numerous, her role in the story of the six wives of Henry VIII is that of a peaceful catalyst."[168] Larsen chooses in this cycle to concentrate on the drama and crises that affected the first five wives, expressing their story as "monodrama of anguish and power."[169]

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[165] This is the spelling that Larsen uses in her vocal score. For the purposes of this document, the spelling Katherine will be used. Alternate spelling is Catherine of Aragon. Similar spelling differences are seen in Larsen's score for subsequent wives Katherine Howard and Katherine Parr. *Catherine of Aragon Wikipedia* [website online]; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_of_Aragon; Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

[166] Alternate spelling Catherine Howard. *Catherine Howard Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Howard; Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

[167] Alternate spelling Catherine Parr. *Catherine Parr Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Parr; Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

[168] *Libby Larsen Website* [website online]; http://libbylarsen.com/index.php?contentID=241&profileID=1369&startRange=; Internet; accessed 29 April 2013.

[169] Ibid.

This famous historical story of the wives of Henry VIII is one that has held Larsen's fascination for much of her life. The memory game "divorce, behead, die, divorce, behead, die" was how she first came to remember the story of these women from 1509-1547.[170] When specifically referencing the ends of these marriages or the subsequent deaths, historically Henry's sixth wife Katherine Parr "survived" or is remembered as "widowed."[171] When the commission came for the cycle from Marilyn Horne for Meagan Miller, Larsen jumped at the chance to set this famous story. Recalling the commission, Larsen stated:

> I chose the story of Henry VIII and his wives because I have been perpetually fascinated by it and its theme of power and the discarded wife. I composed the songs while President Clinton was being impeached for lying about adultery. It seemed clear to me that the wives of Henry VIII were a perfect object of contemplation for our modern day. Rather than focusing on Henry's dilemma, as many depictions do, I wanted to let these extraordinary women speak for themselves. These were smart, strong, self-directed women who still speak to us five hundred years later.[172]

It is that respect for the women themselves and Larsen's desire to have them "speak for themselves" that connects this cycle with Larsen's treatment of Calamity Jane's story in *Songs from Letters.* By using their own words as the texts for the songs, Larsen creates a personal and authentic depiction of the individual experience of each woman. The particular technique Larsen utilized for fashioning her texts together is described in her own words as follows:

> I did a great deal of research into what the queens actually said and wrote. Then, using the book *Letters of the Queens of England, 1100-47,* edited by Anne Crawford, I chose the letters I wished to focus on and extracted the most essential

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[170] Libby Larsen, *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII: For Solo Soprano and Piano*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), vocal score.

[171] *Catherine Parr Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Parr; Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

[172] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

> words, always keeping in mind the vocal issues for singers. For instance, Katherine of Aragon's line, "For my part, I pardon you everything…" is a text setting dream. If you will examine the vowels in this quote, you will see why. With each of the five queens, I pursued this particular method to come up with the libretto. I used the same method in fashioning the libretto for *Songs from Letters*.[173]

Larsen's sense of text setting is at the center of her approach to choosing the words for each of these wives. Her blending of vowels in both their sound and color is of utmost importance for how and why she chooses her words. Vowel color enhances the character of each wife, creating a more distinct interpretation of the wives. Historically, there are many words Larsen could choose for the text of each wife's musical portrait. By concentrating on the most critical words that tell their particular story and emphasizing the words that utilize the optimum combinations of vowels and color, Larsen fashions the text for each wife in manner that is suggestive of their experiences.

Telling the experiences of these women and expressing the dramatic trajectory of their stories ties these musical depictions together. The depiction for each wife takes on an operatic flair, each of the musical portraits serving as a sort of queen's operatic "exit aria," and each portrait serving a different emotional and dramatic affect.[174] While each woman had her own, individual experience as the queen of England, the one character linking them all together is that of Henry himself. Interestingly, Larsen chooses to have Henry's voice remain silent, allowing the voices of the women to stay in their place of prominence in the cycle. While Henry had power over his wives and maintained that power in the story of these women, each woman as a queen was handed a certain amount

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[173] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

[174] Eileen Strempel, "'Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII': Libby Larsen's Royal Portraits of Song," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 1 (2007): 11.

of power for herself. The question of handling said power is one that Larsen considers central to the experiences of these women. The question of female identity and power is one that had permeated the experiences of women throughout history. In Larsen's estimation, the wives of Henry VIII may have been royalty, but in many ways their problems were similar to those encountered by modern women. While questions of domestic power and royal power are certainly not on the same social level, the problems remain connected to female experience.

Much like in *Songs from Letters*, Larsen uses several musical gestures to unify the song cycle. The most prominent of these unifying gestures is Larsen's use of lute song. A lute song, identified with an asterisk in the score by Larsen, accompanies each song of the cycle. This clear identification on Larsen's part shows the importance of the lute song to both the singer and the listener. The role of lute song can be viewed in several ways in the cycle. One such idea is shaping the lute song as a sort of inner monologue for each woman. Another idea to consider is the lute song as the narrator, creating a connective musical texture throughout the cycle. Regarding the use of the lute songs, Larsen recollects:

> I love lute songs and I found myself particularly drawn to them as a source of inspiration. I knew that the lute songs were written in the Elizabethan Era [1558-1603], and we always think of them in connection to courtly love. But why couldn't they be encoded cultural messages, in the way that spirituals are? So I adopted the lute songs like "I care not for these ladies" and "If my complaints could passions move" as subtexts to the queens' words. This was a mess that consumed the whole society at the time.[175]

For Larsen, these references to different lute songs arrived full-blown in her composition, meaning she had a complete understanding of the dramatic and emotional

[175] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

purpose they would serve in each wife's story. The lute songs are often fragmented and altered in pitch in the music in comparison to their original sources; these alterations project and further the dramatic trajectory of each song.[176] They also constitute a layer connecting the musical ideas with the personal and political experience of each wife, serving a critical purpose in the overall dramatic trajectory of the cycle. In this song cycle, Larsen is telling the tragic story of these women and the curse that befell them as wives and queens. That curse had a profound effect on each wife. All but one wife lost their lives due to the actions of King Henry, and that reality is the primary background of Larsen's storytelling. The lute songs can also be interpreted as a subtext to that dramatic trajectory, providing a subtle layer and commentary on the experiences of each wife. For example, the use of Dowland's "In darkness let me dwell" hints at the important ideas of isolation and inevitably of death for both Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Howard. The idea of double entendre and reading the lute song as a comment on the experience of the wife is paramount in understanding the musical fabric of each song. The lute songs for each movement are as follows: John Dowland's "In darkness let me dwell" (Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Howard), Dowland's "If my complaints do passions move" (Anne Boleyn), Praetorius's "Lo, how a rose e'er blooming" (Jane Seymour) and Campion's "I care not for these ladies" (Anne of Cleves). Whether regarded as commentator, narrator, subtext or inner monologue, the lute songs suggest the connective musical narrative for the cycle.

Other musical gestures in the cycle serve to unify the songs together into a collective narrative, including Larsen's careful use of repeated notes. The use of these

[176] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

repeated notes creates a psychological tension as well as recalling an imaginary sound of the lute.[177] As in Larsen's *Songs from Letters,* the use of tritones plays a motivic role, particularly for the musical fabric of Anne of Cleves. And once again, we see Larsen using the sound of tolling bells as a unifying gesture. Where in *Songs from Letters* the bell tolls are used as a metaphor for Jane's memories and recollections, in *Try Me, Good King*, the bells serve a more literal purpose in the cycle, often signifying the impending death of a wife (as in Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard) or the joy of a royal birth (as in Jane Seymour's depiction). Dramatically, the psychological meaning of the bells differs for each wife. Subsequently, Larsen's treatment of the bell tolls depicts this musical difference for each woman's experience. Larsen: "An abstract bell tolling punctuates each song and releases the spiritual meaning of the words."[178] Each of these musical gestures creates a connective layer for the cycle, relating the experiences of each woman to her truth while unifying them under the same, royal curse. Larsen accomplishes this by weaving each gesture throughout the song and cycle's texture, and tailoring the musical character of the gesture to the life of the woman being depicted. For example, while bell tolls signify a trip to the gallows for Anne Boleyn, they symbolize the joyous announcement of King Henry's first son Edward for Jane Seymour. By using the same musical gesture in a different way, Larsen fashions a connective layer for the cycle as a whole. The particular purpose for the gestures allows the truth of that wife's experience to be expressed, but the overall gesture remains the same, thereby placing each wife in the grip of the royal curse that brings about her demise.

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[177] Libby Larsen, *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII: For Solo Soprano and Piano*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), vocal score.

[178] Ibid.

The first song of the cycle enacts the text of Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon. The text comes from a letter from Katherine to Henry VIII dated 7 January 1536, as carefully indicated by Larsen in the vocal score. Katherine was originally the royal consort to Arthur, Henry's older brother. Upon Arthur's untimely death, Katherine (then only sixteen years old) was betrothed to Henry in an effort to keep the critical Anglo-Spanish alliance intact. While the early part of their marriage was largely happy, following the joy of the birth of their daughter Mary, the marriage gradually grew bitter and full of disappointment when Katherine was unable to produce a male heir.[179] Their historic story was further complicated when Henry's attention turned to a new lady of the court, Anne Boleyn in 1526. Henry sought annulment from the marriage in 1527, but Katherine would not consent. Despite her refusal to consent to the annulment, Henry went on to marry Anne Boleyn, and Katherine withdrew from Windsor Castle. And despite his atrocious treatment of her and her banishment, Katherine never stopped loving her husband.

The text from which Larsen draws this musical depiction comes from Katherine's final letter to Henry, as her life was drawing to its close. "The ostracized Katherine's prayerful utterances at the end of her life gave voice to her complex marital situation at the time…Katherine herself was too weak to write the letter, and instead dictated her final missive to one of her ladies."[180] The literal text of that final letter is as follows:

> My most dear lord, King and husband,
>
> The hour of my death now drawing on, the tender love I ouge [owe] thou forceth me, my case being such, to commend myselv to thou, and to put thou in remembrance with a few words of the healthe and safeguard of thine allm [soul]

[179] Strempel, 12.
[180] Ibid.

> which thou ougte to preferce before all worldley matters, and before the care and pampering of thy body, for the which thoust have cast me into many calamities and thineselv into many troubles. For my part, I pardon thou everything, and I desire to devoutly pray God that He will pardon thou also. For the rest, I commend unto thou our doughtere Mary, beseeching thou to be a good father unto her, as I have heretofore desired. I entreat thou also, on behalve of my maides, to give them marriage portions, which is not much, they being but three. For all mine other servants I solicit the wages due them, and a year more, lest they be unprovided for. Lastly, I makest this vouge [vow], that mine eyes desire thou aboufe all things.
>
> Katharine the Quene.[181]

The text as seen above differs slightly from the text fashioned by Larsen. Larsen's text in the musical portrait is as follows:

> My most dear Lord, King, and Husband,
>
> The hour of my death now drawing on, the tender love I owe you forces me... to commend myself unto you and put you in remembrance of the health and welfare of your soul… You have cast me into many calamities and yourself into many troubles. For my part, I pardon you everything, and I wish to devoutly pray God that He will pardon you also. For the rest, I commend unto you our daughter, Mary, beseeching you to be a good father unto her… Lastly, I make this vow, that my eyes desire you above all things…[182]

These changes in Larsen's text may be motivated for several reasons. First, Larsen has used a more modern English to express Katherine's pained words to her estranged husband, making the text easier for a modern audience to understand. Secondly, the text regarding her other servants and maids and their payment is omitted. Larsen's purpose in setting Katherine's words in this musical portrait is to display her emotions and reactions to her situation with her husband. The disdainful emotions she feels in being shunned and banished are fully expressed with each sentiment to Henry

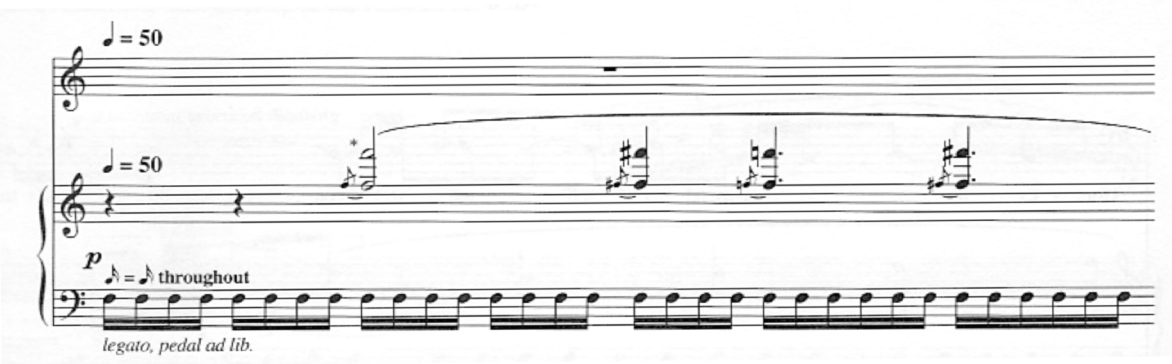
[181] *Catherine of Aragon Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_of_Aragon; Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

[182] Larsen, 28.

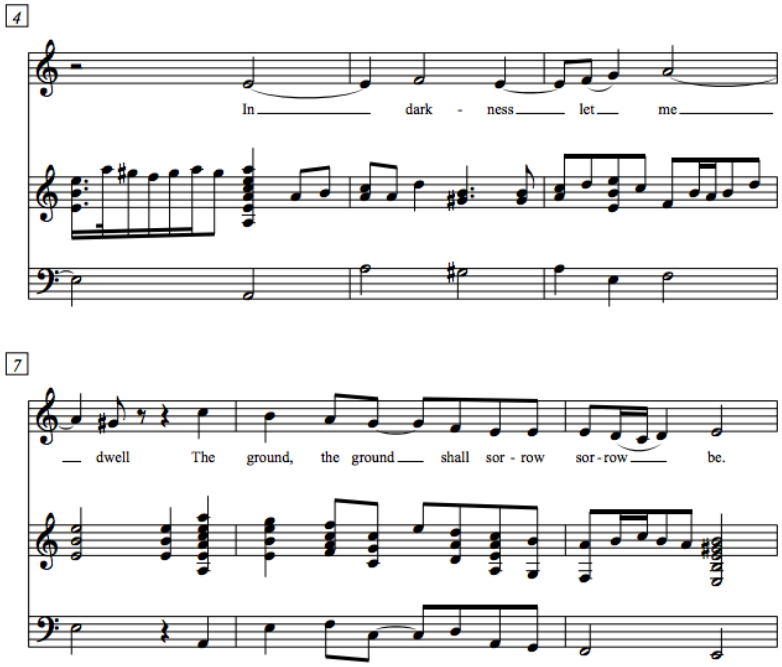
(i.e. “You have cast me into many calamities”). Similarly, she is almost admonishing Henry for her treatment of her, praying that God will forgive him as she has. Larsen pays careful attention to the vowel combinations of the words, always paying close attention to how the words are formed in the mouth and how these formations affect the singing of the text. For example, the text “For my part, I pardon you everything” utilizes each major vowel in the phonetic alphabet (i.e. [o] [ɑ] [a] [u] [ɛ] [i]). This line falls vocally precisely in the primo passaggio for soprano voice. By completing the line with the [i] vowel, Larsen provides a bit of vocal help for the singer, allowing the voice to narrow and more easily navigate the different registers (an example of Larsen keeping the singer’s issues in mind). By focusing on these aspects of Katherine’s story, Larsen carefully shapes her text to create the fabric of her story.

The heartbreaking reality of Katherine’s story is perfectly put to music by Larsen. One of the first noticeable aspects of the music lies in the deliberate absence of bar lines. The sense of agony and tension in the first few lines is strongly expressed through repeated low Fs and the lack of bar lines, “as if there were no bar lines powerful enough to contain this agony.”[183] In the first musical material, two examples of Larsen’s unifying gestures are seen; the ostinato of the repeated note as well as the use of the first lute song “In darkness let me dwell” (Example 18). Larsen’s quote from Dowland’s lute song as seen in Example 18 is transposed up a half step and fragmented in comparison to the original. The un-transposed melodic pattern of the opening of Dowland’s “In darkness let me dwell” follows as shown in Example 19.

[183] Strempel, 13.



Example 18. Larsen, "Katherine of Aragon," pg. 1. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 19. Dowland," In darkness let me dwell," mm. 4–9. http://imslp.org/wiki/In_Darkness_let_Me_Dwell_(Dowland, John); Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

Example 18 shows Larsen's use of the repeated low Fs to create psychological tension. The effect on the ear of this first example is to hear the first lute reference as a high "bell" pattern in the accompaniment. By linking both motives (lute song and bell toll), Larsen fashions a double symbolism for the impending death that Katherine is sensing as she writes these words. This psychological tension continues throughout

Katherine's musical portrait, never ceasing and never resolving, symbolizing death's inevitable advance upon her. The first lute song, "In darkness let me dwell" (identified by the asterisk) has textual as well as musical symbolism. The text of the lute song is as follows:

> In darkness let me dwell; the ground shall sorrow be,
> The roof despair, to bar all cheerful light from me;
> The walls of marble black, that moist'ned still shall weep;
> My music, hellish jarring sounds, to banish friendly sleep.
> Thus, wedded to my woes, and bedded in my tomb,
> O let me dying live, till death doth come, till death doth come.
> My dainties grief shall be, and tears my poison'd wine,
> My sighs the air, through which my panting heart shall pine:
> My robes my mind shall suit exceeding blackest night,
> My study shall be tragic thoughts, sad fancy to delight.
> Pale ghosts and frightful shades shall my acquaintance be:
> O thus, my hapless joy, I haste to thee, I haste to thee.[184]

In the last period of Katherine's life, she was banished and living alone in one room of the Kimbolton Castle, forbidden to see her daughter Mary.[185] She left this room only to attend Mass and fasted continually. The text of the lute song can be seen as a metaphor for this experience. "The roof despair, to bar all cheerful light from me" symbolizes her isolation in that single room during her banishment. The text of the lute song also comments on Katherine's own plea for death. While Katherine herself may not say that she is pleading for death, the lute song says it for her in its various musical permutations. For example, as she states "The tender love I owe you forces me to commend myself unto you," the second statement from Dowland is heard in the piano

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[184] John Dowland, *In Darkness let me dwell* [vocal score online], http://imslp.org/wiki/In_Darkness_let_Me_Dwell_(Dowland,_John); Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

[185] *Catherine of Aragon Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_of_Aragon; Internet; accessed 19 June 2013.

accompaniment (Example 20). Dowland's text which accompanies this musical quote states "The ground, the ground shall sorrow sorrow be." The emotional content of these two textual ideas is contrasting: Katherine's words express love for her husband, while Dowland's text expresses the sorrow that comes with death's inevitability. By commending herself to the king, Katherine is thereby commending herself unto death.

Example 20. Larsen, "Katherine of Aragon," pg. 2. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

Katherine's depiction is full of contrasting emotions. Love, anger, frustration and betrayal are just several of the emotions permeating this text. These contrasting emotions are further expressed through musical contrasts. For instance, Example 20 shows Katherine's words expressing her love for the king, and this moment is marked for the singer as *gently*, lending evidence to how Larsen wishes this moment to be portrayed dramatically. Meanwhile, the unrelenting ostinato in the piano continues, further

expressing the psychological tension. This contrast of gentle (love) to unrelenting (frustration) is a striking example of Larsen's ability to musically represent Katherine's contrasting emotions. Dramatically, the performer might interpret this moment as a firm example of Katherine's devout love for her husband as well her frustration and disdain for her current position. The "gentle" vocal character quickly changes, cued by the score indication *gradually becoming stern* as the first bell toll sounds (Example 19). Vocally, this moment should see a marked change in vocal color. For example, the vocal color should not be abrasive or forced on the line "the tender love I owe you," but rather gentle and smooth, using legato singing. As the line becomes sterner, a more forward placed sound coupled with a more marcato vocal approach could be utilized to signify this change in Katherine's attitude.

For Katherine, the bell tolls have several symbolic purposes. First, the bell tolls symbolize death's impending march, inescapable and unrelenting in the song; much like the repeated ostinato low Fs. The bell toll may also symbolize her conviction of her right to the throne; hence its position in the score specifically where Larsen has marked *gradually becoming stern*. The bell tolls have a prominent place in this first song of the cycle, appearing frequently and particularly at imploring moments of text (i.e. "And I wish to devoutly pray God that he will pardon you also" and "For the rest, I commend unto you our daughter, Mary, beseeching you to be a good father unto her"). The lute song returns for one more appearance following the text "You have cast me into many calamites and yourself into many troubles" and before the text "For my part, I pardon you ev'rything." The musical occurrence of this quote from Dowland can be interpreted in two ways. First, it comments on Katherine's admonishment of Henry as he has cast

himself into many troubles. In this instance, the quote from Dowland symbolizes Henry's own doom and his downfall due to his unjust choices. Secondly, it may allude to Katherine's words of pardon. In that case, the quote symbolizes her releasing Henry from his duties to her and thus releasing herself into the freedom that comes with death. Dramatically, the performer may choose either interpretation in her performance of this moment. Each of these musical gestures (bell tolls, lute songs) weaves between the final words of Katherine, commenting on her very bleak situation. Her impending death would be the only release from anguish and her terrible position of isolation in banishment.

The second song of the cycle depicts the experience of Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn. Larsen chooses several sources for Anne's words as the text for the song. These sources include a letter from Anne to Henry dated 6 May 1536, quotes from Henry's love letters, a quote from a letter of the Constable of the Tower William Kingston, and finally Anne's famous execution speech from 19 May 1536. Musically, Anne's entrance is quite riotous, notably contrasting with Katherine of Aragon's character. Anne's story is one that is well known. Initially, Henry found Anne Boleyn charming and intelligent. It was exactly those characteristics that would try his patience when Anne failed to produce a male heir. Her own temper grew, and she grew vengeful as Henry began to flirt with another woman of the court, Jane Seymour. Jane was precisely everything Anne was not. Where Jane was modest, Anne was fiery. These qualities that Henry saw in Jane made him desire her for his wife instead of Anne. Henry began to make accusations against Anne, claiming she used witchcraft to ensnare him.[186] The king's Foreign Minister Thomas Cromwell brought charges up against Anne on 29

[186] Strempel, 14.

April 1536, claiming adultery and treason against the king. Anne, along with her ladies in waiting, were tried and convicted, and were condemned to death. Anne's own execution was to be a beheading, and on 19 May 1536, the sentence was carried out. In the moments preceding her execution, Anne gave her final public speech. It is from this final speech that Larsen fashions portions of the text for Anne's depiction in the song cycle. The order of text that Larsen chooses for her musical depiction differs significantly from what is found in the letters themselves. Larsen carefully chooses particular words and ideas from these three sources in her creation of Anne's text. By specifically choosing particular moments from the letters, Larsen fashions her interpretation of Anne's experience as her life as the Queen of England is drawing to a close. Reordering, omitting and carefully choosing which texts to set allows Larsen the dramatic freedom to create her own depiction of Anne Boleyn, emphasizing the fiery and defiant nature of her character.

Larsen's specific choices of text for Anne's musical portrait provide important insights for performance. By examining the text in detail, one can better understand the dramatic pacing of Anne's character and thereby better express her position and emotions through the music. Anne's letter to Henry dated 6 May 1536 and her final gallows speech from 19 May 1535 can be seen in their entirety as follows (in the following excerpted letter and speech, the portions of text utilized by Larsen in her musical depiction are shown in bold). Larsen's text is quoted subsequently.

> "Sir,
> Your Grace's displeasure, and my imprisonment are things so strange unto me, as what to write, or what to excuse, I am altogether ignorant. Whereas you send unto me (willing me to confess a truth, and so obtain your favour) by such an one, whom you know to be my ancient professed enemy. I no sooner received this message by him, than I rightly conceived your meaning; and if, as you say,

confessing a truth indeed may procure my safety, I shall with all willingness and duty perform your demand.

But let not your Grace ever imagine, that your poor wife will ever be brought to acknowledge a fault, where not so much as a thought thereof preceded. And to speak a truth, **never prince had wife more loyal in all duty, and in all true affection, than you have ever found in Anne Boleyn**: with which name and place I could willingly have contented myself, if God and your Grace's pleasure had been so pleased. Neither did I at any time so far forget myself in my exaltation or received Queenship, but that I always looked for such an alteration as I now find; for the ground of my preferment being on no surer foundation than your Grace's fancy, the least alteration I knew was fit and sufficient to draw that fancy to some other object. **You have chosen me, from a low estate, to be your Queen and companion,** far beyond my desert or desire. If then you found me worthy of such honour, good your Grace let not any light fancy, or bad council of mine enemies, withdraw your princely favour from me; neither let that stain, that unworthy stain, of a disloyal heart toward your good grace, ever cast so foul a blot on your most dutiful wife, and the infant-princess your daughter. **Try me, good king, but let me have a lawful trial, and let not my sworn enemies sit as my accusers and judges; yea let me receive an open trial, for my truth shall fear no open flame**; then shall you see either my innocence cleared, your suspicion and conscience satisfied, the ignominy and slander of the world stopped, or my guilt openly declared. So that whatsoever God or you may determine of me, your grace may be freed of an open censure, and mine offense being so lawfully proved, your grace is at liberty, both before God and man, not only to execute worthy punishment on me as an unlawful wife, but to follow your affection, already settled on that party, for whose sake I am now as I am, whose name I could some good while since have pointed unto, your Grace being not ignorant of my suspicion therein. But if you have already determined of me, and that not only my death, but an infamous slander must bring you the enjoying of your desired happiness; then I desire of God, that he will pardon your great sin therein, and likewise mine enemies, the instruments thereof, and that he will not call you to a strict account of your unprincely and cruel usage of me, at his general judgment-seat, where both you and myself must shortly appear, and in whose judgment I doubt not (whatsoever the world may think of me) **mine innocence shall be openly known, and sufficiently cleared.** My last and only request shall be, that myself may only bear the burden of your Grace's displeasure, and that it may not touch the innocent souls of those poor gentlemen, who (as I understand) are likewise in strait imprisonment for my sake. **If ever I found favour in your sight, if ever the name of Anne Boleyn hath been pleasing in your ears, then let me obtain this request,** and I will so leave to trouble your Grace any further, with mine earnest prayers to the Trinity to have your Grace in his good keeping, and to direct you in all your actions. From my doleful prison in the Tower, this sixth of May;

Your most loyal and ever faithful wife,

Anne Boleyn"[187]

> **Good Christian people, I am come hither to die, for according to the law, and by the law I am judged to die**, and therefore I will speak nothing against it. I am come hither to accuse no man, nor to speak anything of that, whereof I am accused and condemned to die, but **I pray God save the king** and send him long to reign over you, for a gentler nor a more merciful prince was there never: and to me he was ever a good, a gentle and sovereign lord. And if any person will meddle of my cause, I require them to judge the best. And thus I take my leave of the world and of you all, and I heartily desire you all to pray for me. O Lord have mercy on me, to God I commend my soul.[188]

Larsen's text:

> Try me, good king… and let me have a lawful trial, and let not my… enemies sit as my accusers and judges… Let me receive an open trial for my truth shall fear no open shame… Never a prince had a wife more loyal in all duty… in all true affection, than you have found in Anne Bulen… You have chosen me from low estate to be your wife and companion… Do you not remember the words of your own hand? "My own darling…I would you were in my arms… for I think it long since I kissed you. My mistress and friend…" Try me, good king… If ever I have found favor in your sight – if ever the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to your ears – then let me obtain this request… and my innocence shall be… known and… cleared. Good Christian People, I come hither to die… and by the law I am judged to die… I pay God save the King. I heard the executioner's good, and my neck is so little…[189]

The final expression in the song comes from a letter by William Kingston, the Constable of the Tower where Anne spent her incarceration before her execution.[190] The text from this letter follows, with the text used by Larsen in bold type.

> This morning she sent for me, that I might be with her at such time as she received the good Lord, to the intent I should hear her speak as touching her innocency alway to be clear. And in the writing of this she sent for me, and at my coming she said, "Mr. Kingston, I hear I shall not die afore noon, and I am very sorry therefore, for I thought to be dead by this time and past my pain." I told her it should be no pain, it was so little. And then she said, **"I heard say the**

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[187] *Anne Boleyn Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Boleyn; Internet, accessed 19 June 2013.

[188] Ibid.

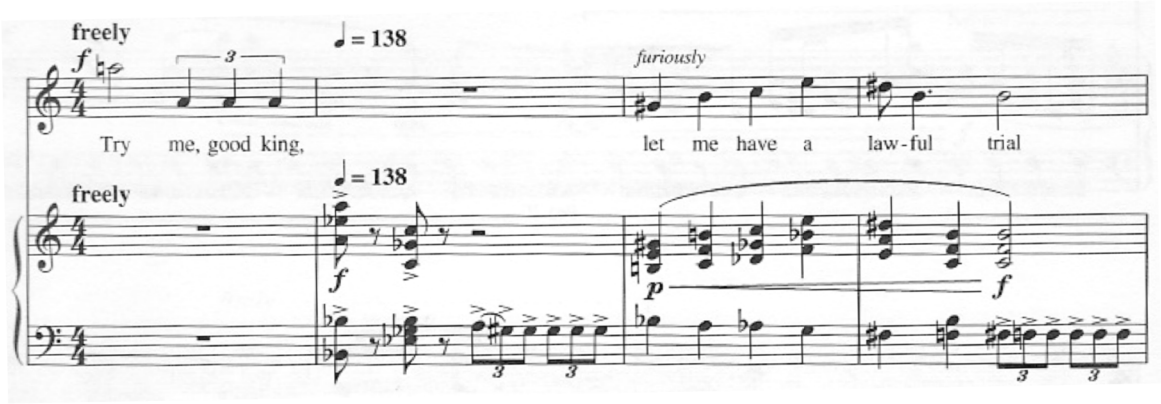
[189] Larsen, 28.

[190] *Anne Boleyn Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Boleyn; Internet, accessed 20 June 2013.

> **executioner was very good, and I have a little neck,"** and then put her hands about it, laughing heartily. I have seen many men and also women executed, and that they have been in great sorrow, and to my knowledge this lady has much joy in death. Sir, her almoner is continually with her, and had been since two o'clock after midnight.[191]

In examining these sections of text chosen by Larsen, one can see the dramatic and emotional trajectory that Larsen may have in mind for her musical portrait of Anne Boleyn. The only section not represented in these letters is the text from Henry's love letter as well as Anne's words "Do you not remember the words of your own hand?" By organizing these words in this particular manner, Larsen intentionally creates the fiery persona of Anne Boleyn. Additionally, this fashioning of text inspires an interpretation of the musical portrait as a microcosm for Anne's non-existent trial. Anne's character begins defiantly, crying, "Try me, good king," and thus initiates her plea for a fair trial. Dramatically, Larsen's choice to begin with this text expresses Anne's reluctance to go to her death quietly. From this first outcry, the listener is instantly present in the moment where Anne attempts to defend herself against the charges brought against her. This opening cry is quickly followed by one of Larsen's unifying motives: the repeated notes (Example 21).

[191] *Anne Boleyn Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Boleyn; Internet, accessed 20 June 2013.



Example 21. Larsen, "Anne Boleyn," mm. 1–4. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

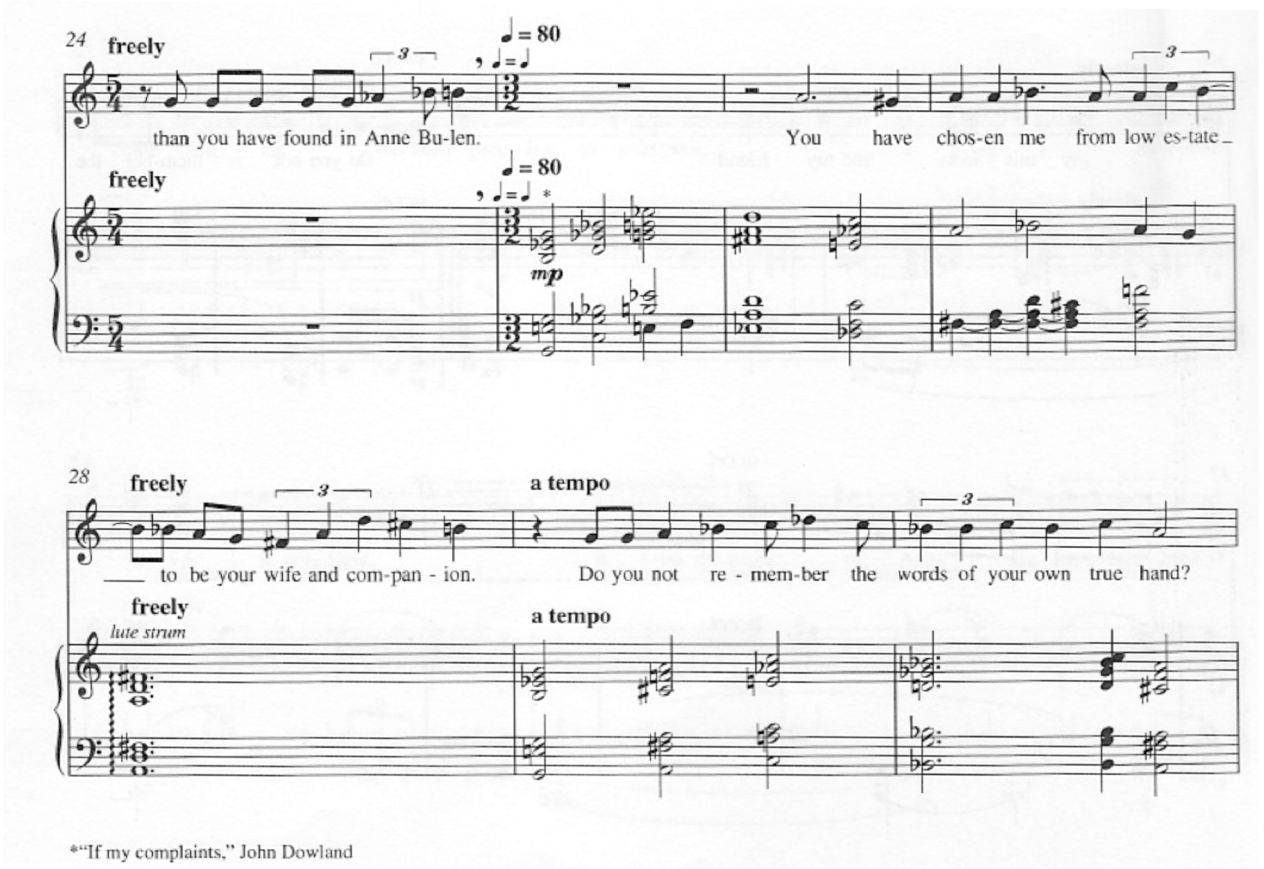
Example 21 also displays contrary motion in the piano and vocal lines, symbolizing growing anxiety as the voice rises in pitch and impending doom as the piano descends in half-note increments. Sudden dynamic shifts are also evident in Example 21, lending further support to the heightened anxiety. Larsen uses these gestures (the vocal cry, repetitive notes, contrary motion, dynamic shifts) to paint the sense of disaster and desperation that Anne was certainly experiencing at this point. Bell tolls play a different role in Anne's depiction than that of Katherine of Aragon. In Katherine's song they were steady and repetitive; in Anne's song they transform into pounding heartbeats that stop and catch in the doomed queen's throat.[192]

Larsen freely repeats Anne's cry of "Try me, good king" at several points in the song. Her repetition of this text reinforces its importance in expressing Anne's character. The repetition solidifies the ear to Anne's cry for a fair judgment, and the listener better understands the critical nature of Anne's situation. The following text of "Never a prince had a wife more loyal" symbolizes Anne's attempt at defending herself. This defense is followed by the quotation from Henry's love letter. Larsen carefully utilizes the lute song

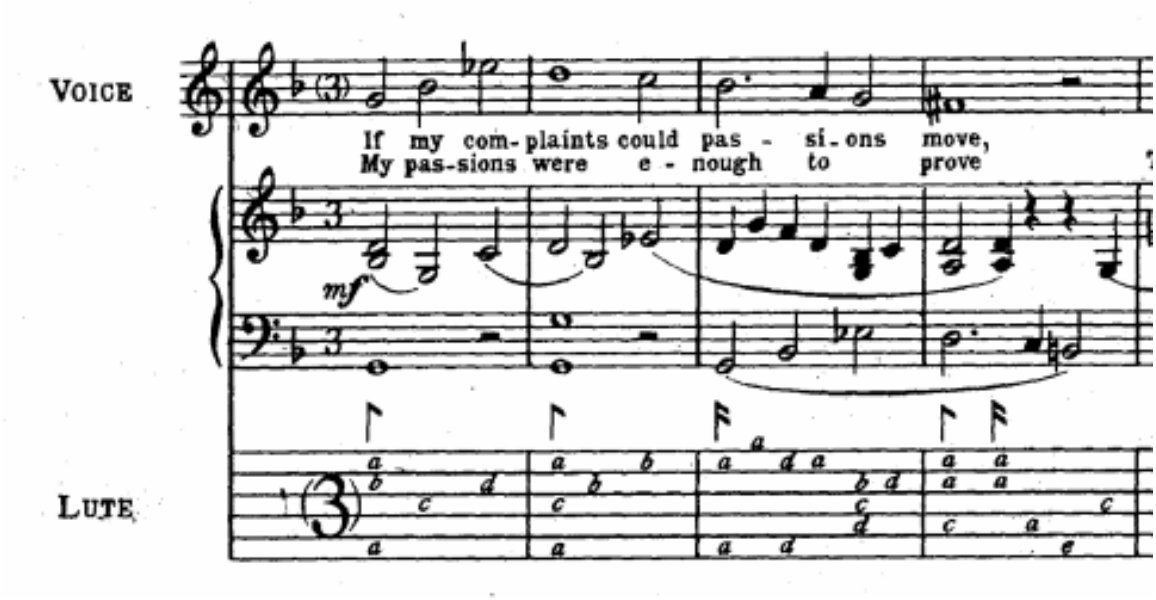
[192] Strempel, 14.

"If my complaints could passions move" by John Dowland at this point in the song where Anne quotes Henry's tender words (Example 22). Example 23 shows the excerpt of Dowland's lute song from which Larsen quotes. Again Larsen identifies the lute song by an asterisk, confirming its importance to singer and pianist. The use of this lute song plays a psychological role in the song. The first line of text in Dowland's lute song states "If my complaints could passions move, or make Love see wherein I suffer wrong."[193] When viewing the song as a microcosm for Anne's absent trial, the placement of this lute song symbolizes her desire to change Henry's mind about her fate, and to hope that her complaints against her position could move his heart to pardon her. Musically, the accompaniment abruptly changes to chordal passages with "lute strum" identified by Larsen in the piano part. Anne's recollection is sweet and loving, but the music itself is still disjunctive, suggesting the ominous realty facing Anne. This disjunction can be seen in the contrasting rhythms of voice and piano (i.e. triplet figures in the voice against steady quarters in the piano) as well as the marked changes from strict meter to recitative. These marked and abrupt musical changes symbolize Anne's emotional changes and are central to Larsen's characterization.

[193] John Dowland, *If my complaints could passions move* [vocal score online], http://artsongcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/lute114.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 June 2013.

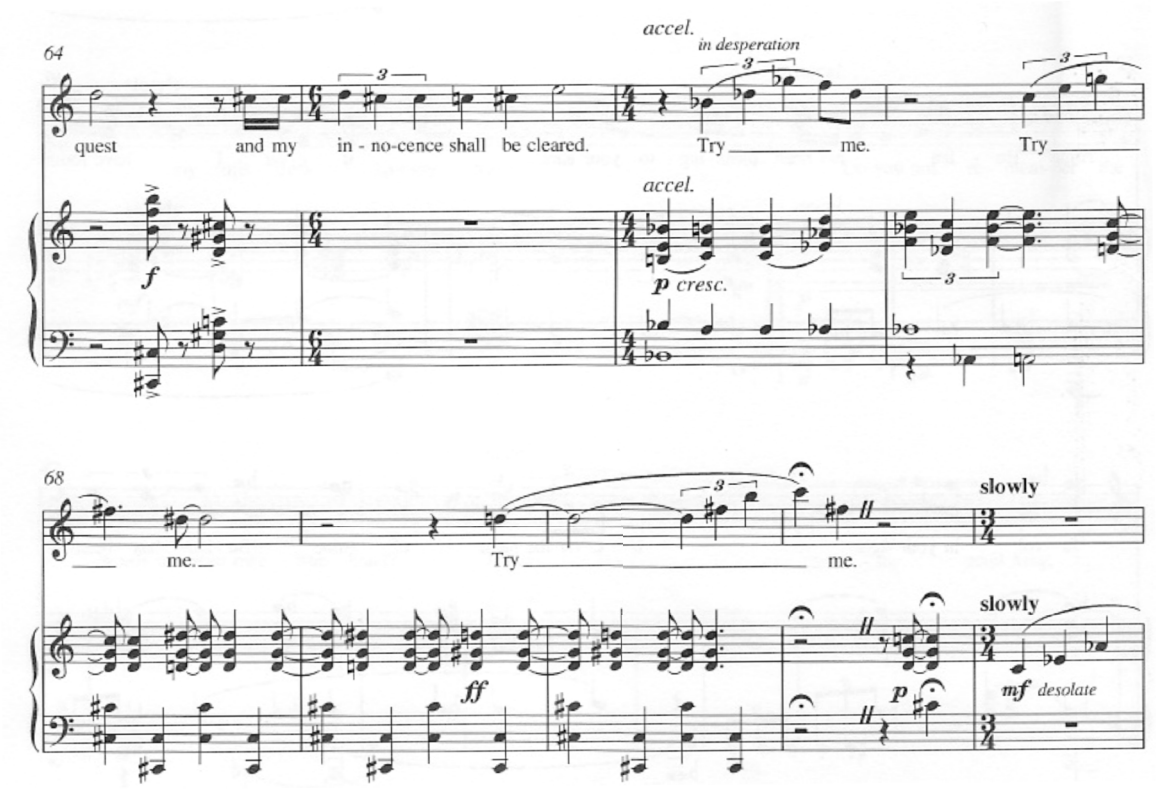


Example 22. Larsen, "Anne Boleyn," mm. 24–30. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 23. Dowland, "If my complaints could passions move," mm. 1–4. http://artsongcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/lute114.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 June 2013.

Throughout the musical portrait, Anne moves from moments of frustration and anger to pleading and desperation. The text following Henry's quote states "if ever I have found favor in your sight, if ever the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to your ears," and Larsen specifically repeats this text twice for emphasis. Again, Larsen's use of repetition is an intentional psychological tool for the ear. With this repetition, Larsen raises the pitch, heightening the anxiety Anne is feeling. As the song is reaching its climax, Larsen once again employs music-text repetition for psychological and dramatic purpose. She characteristically repeats the text "Try me" three times. Each of her cries of "Try me" rises in pitch until her final cry in mm. 70-71 poignantly ends with an inverted tritone (Example 24). Larsen's utilization of the tritone in this instance marks the breaking point for Anne. This final repetition of "Try me" also sees the highest note at this point in the cycle, C6. This is the first vocal moment in the cycle during which the singer can utilize major vocal power, though overall pacing must be kept in mind. There is still much more singing to be done, but this moment calls for the full use of the voice: dynamic, color and spin on this note will enhance its symbolism for Anne's desperation. The specific three-fold repetition is reminiscent of *Songs from Letters*, where a similar three-fold repetition of increasing intensity heightened dramatic purpose (see page 71 of this document). Throughout the song, Anne has been attempting to defend herself against her accusers. In these final outcries, she has reached her emotional brink. By intensifying and raising the pitch level of each cry, Larsen highlights Anne's frustration and emotions in not being heard. Larsen marks the vocal line as *in desperation*. Perhaps if she cries out once more at an even higher level, someone will finally hear her pleas. History tells us this is not the case; her pleas went unanswered.



Example 24. Larsen, "Anne Boleyn," mm. 64–72. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

The final measures of the song show a bleak and sparse piano line with the vocal line marked *half-voiced*. The imagery of the piano and voice illustrate Anne's solemn walk to the gallows and her words "I hear the executioner's good, and my neck is so little" are practically whispered with barely any sound from the piano to support her. This line provides an excellent opportunity to display more contrast in vocal color. The performer has just sung her highest note in the previous measures, and now has the opportunity for a weak, breathy color choice. This change from power to weakness gives even more specification to Anne's character: she has essentially given up her fight. As stated previously, this line of text comes from Kingston's letter, reflecting upon his last encounter with Anne. It is particularly interesting to examine why Larsen chose to end

her musical tribute with this line rather than Anne's final words from her gallows speech. That speech records her final utterance as "O Lord have mercy on me, to God I commend my soul."[194] Rather than use this expression, Larsen chooses Anne's more ironic words to end the song. This is further evidence to the concept that the song is a microcosm for Anne's would-be trial. By the end of the piece, the "trial" is over. Her cries were not heard, she prayed to God and has prayed that God save the King. Larsen maintains the complex and defiant nature of Anne all the way to the end, and the use of that text further accentuates her defiance. Larsen precisely executes this musical portrait and dramatic character of this feisty and dismal woman. With cries of anguish, strict and sudden tempo changes, abrupt dynamic shifts and the careful weaving of the lute song, listeners instantaneously feel as though they know and understand this complex, defiant and doomed queen.

The musical departure from Anne Boleyn's story to Larsen's portrait of Jane Seymour is as sudden and abrupt as it likely was in real life. After all, Henry was betrothed to Jane only twenty-four hours after the horrific execution of Anne Boleyn.[195] A mere seventeen months after their marriage, Queen Jane gave birth to the much-anticipated male heir, Edward. Larsen chooses to share Jane's story from the point of view following the exhausting hours of her three-day labor.[196] The text for Jane's depiction comes from a letter from Jane to the Council dated 12 October 1537, accompanied by the lyrics from the anonymous song "Tudor Rose." The theme of roses is suggested with Larsen's lute song choice "Lo, how a rose e're blooming" by Praetorius

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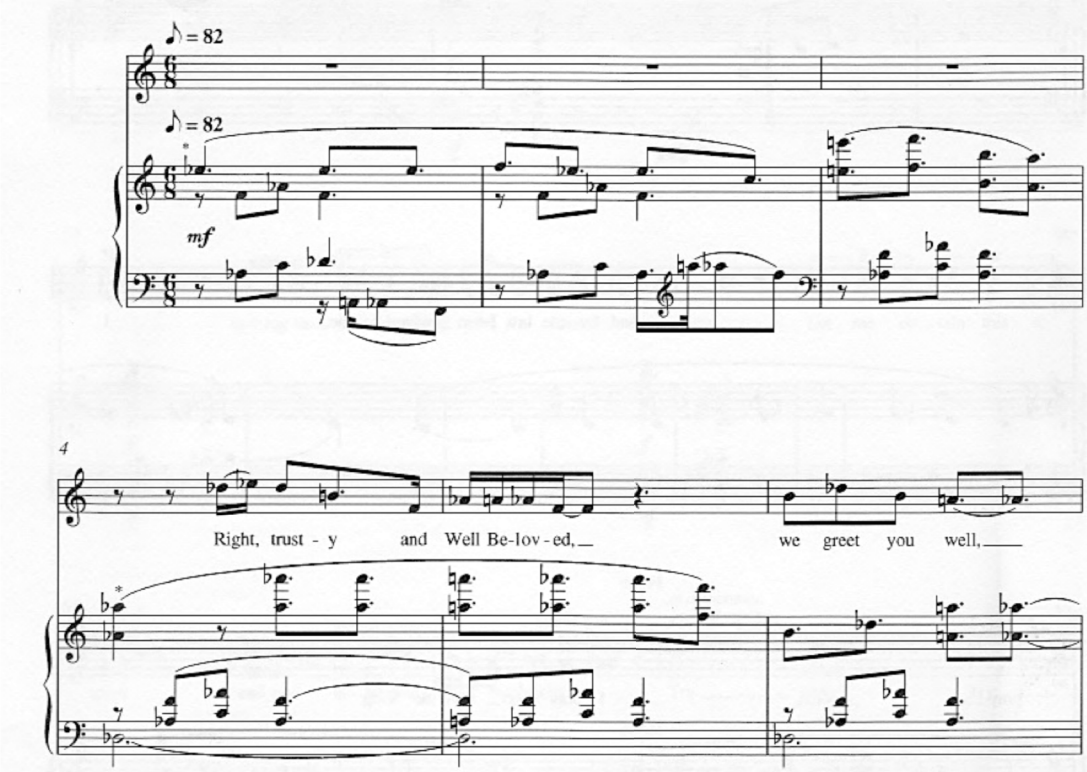
[194] *Anne Boleyn Wikipedia* [website online]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Boleyn; Internet, accessed 20 June 2013.

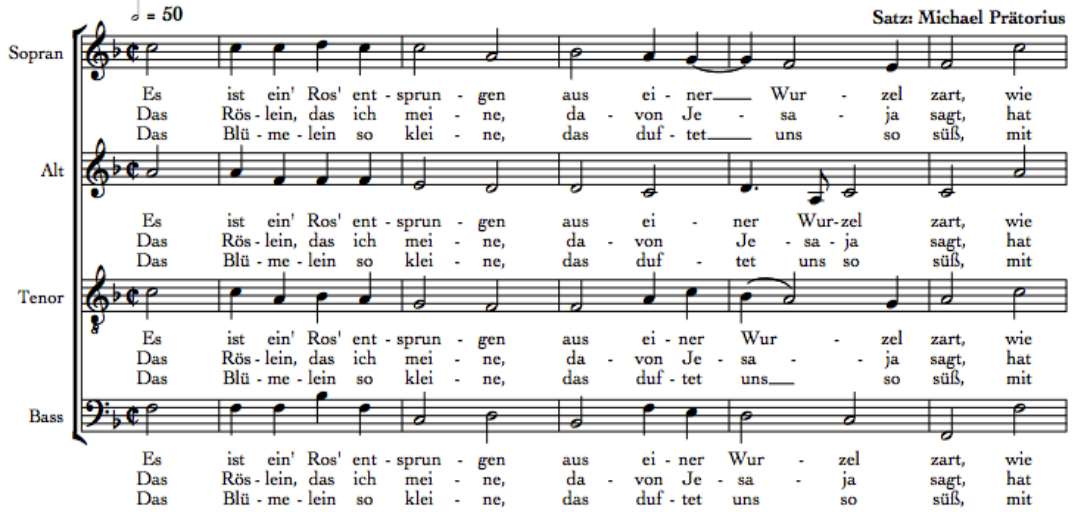
[195] Strempel, 14.

[196] Ibid.

(Example 25). Example 26 shows the primary melodic material by Praetorius that Larsen quotes in Jane's musical depiction.



Example 25. Larsen, "Jane Seymour," mm. 1–6. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

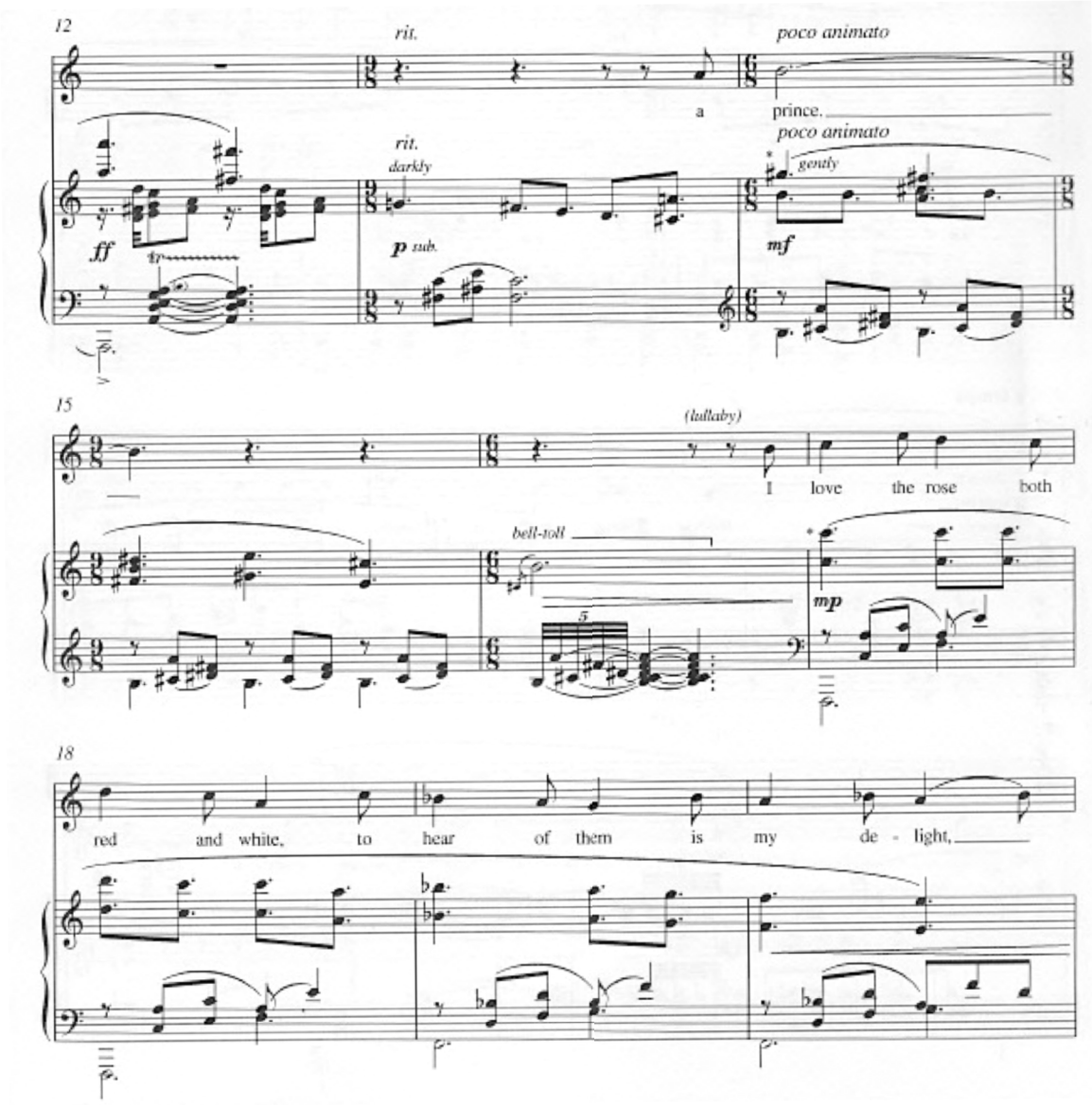


Example 26. Praetorius, "Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungnen," mm. 1–5. http://imslp.org/wiki/Es_ist_ein_Ros_entsprungen_(Praetorius,_Michael); Internet, accessed 24 June 2013.

Larsen chooses by far the prettiest melody and lute song for Jane Seymour, perhaps as a nod to Henry's one true love. In contrast to Katherine of Aragon's depiction as unrelenting and through composed and Anne Boleyn's music as disjunctive and fiery, Jane Seymour's music is reminiscent of a lullaby, utilizing a simple 6/8-meter and a melody that is nearly tonal in its basis. The attractiveness of melody in Jane's portrait comes largely from the quoting of the lute song. Larsen's treatment of the lute song is particularly distinctive in musically depicting Jane's character. While the direct quote from the lute song lies in the piano accompaniment, the vocal line, which accompanies the quote in mm. 16–20, is a lovely melodic addition (Example 26). The narrow range and simple rhythm provide the melodic basis for the textual quote from "Tudor Rose." This particular lute song is one typically sung at Christmas time, proving further symbolism of the importance of Edward, symbolized as a Christ-figure for Jane, seen as her savior in many ways. The vocal quality is tender and loving, providing the singer with an excellent opportunity for a new color and character in performance. Until this point in the cycle, genuine love and tenderness has not been an emotion expressed by the wives. But for Jane, love, awe and amazement are the primary emotions. Her lovely melody, accentuated by the lute song and lullaby nature of the vocalism is an excellent opportunity for the singer to display even more emotional depth in her choice of color and nuance.

Alas, Jane's story does not end happily. She sadly passes away just twelve days after Edward's birth, and a dark foreboding quality is also present in Larsen's musical portrait, particularly heard through Larsen's use of one of her favorite motivic tools, the tritone. Where the lute song coincides with Jane's lullaby "Tudor Rose," the message is

happy and full of joy. But, directly preceding this moment are dissonant tritones in the left hand of the piano at m. 13, ominously marked by Larsen as *darkly* (Example 27). This quality of darkness and foreboding is best conveyed through the piano accompaniment.



Example 27. Larsen, "Jane Seymour," mm. 12–20. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

By emphasizing the tritone dissonance at a very quiet dynamic, the pianist expresses the idea that something dreadful may be lurking around the corner for the otherwise happy wife and mother. For the singer, this moment does not require a vocal commentary. But the singer should hear the moment and react dramatically for the audience, so that the effect of this dark foreboding is optimally understood. Following this dark moment, the singer repeats "a prince." This repetition can be seen as Jane dramatically ignoring that sense of foreboding. By repeating the line "a prince," Jane is convincing herself that her future will be secure and that she will escape the dreadful fate that befell the previous queens. This moment also allows an opportunity for the vocalist to hint at the illness plaguing Jane. On the repetition of "a prince," the singer could employ a breathier tone, hinting that Jane is not entirely well. The line falls perfectly in middle voice, approaching the first passaggio, and an intentional breathy tone would provide some important dramatic color to the character.

Example 27 also displays another rendering of bell tolls by Larsen, this time symbolizing joy and happy tidings rather than death and desperation. The bell-toll in Example 27 is suggested musically in the piano accompaniment, and is the vocal cue for the lullaby melody. In this instance, the bell-toll is the lead in for the beginning of the lullaby and symbolizes Jane's emergence as a new mother. Bell tolls in this depiction are also often heard in the upper registers of the piano and in octaves (i.e. mm. 10–12), symbolizing the joyful pealing that would accompany a royal birth. The song draws to a close in the final measures with Jane softly humming her baby to sleep. It is important in those final measures to hum rather than use an "ooh" or "ah" vocalism. Larsen makes this distinction as an important character choice. At the end of the piece, Jane should sound as

if she is dying and weak.[197] The hum helps to paint that picture more clearly. The dramatic character of this final moment is critical to the performance of this song. Humming in the upper registers is not always easy for a singer to vocalize. But, the difficulty of the hum is exactly what can give the quality of a person who is ill and dying. The singer should slightly open the lips at the final high G so the hum can be heard, but if the tone is somewhat weak and breathy, it will only emphasize the sickness Jane was experiencing toward the end. Throughout this musical portrait, there are opportunities for the singer to hint at the illness Jane was experiencing. By carefully choosing moments of to color the voice with a bit more breathiness (i.e. the hum at the end of the piece, or adding more breathiness to the tone at the repetition of "a prince"), the singer is providing vocal subtext to Jane's story as Henry's wife and true love.

The fourth song of the cycle is a musical portrait Anne of Cleves. Following Jane Seymour's death, Cromwell went on a search for a new wife for Henry. Naturally, Cromwell was searching for a match that would serve England positively in a political sphere. He came upon Anne of Cleves, who could provide an ally between England and Germany. Henry sent the court portrait painter to render him a painting of Anne of Cleves, and he happily found her portrait appropriate and was pleased to consent to marry her. Unfortunately, when he saw her in person, he was much dismayed and not in the least bit attracted to Anne of Cleves. In 1540, he married her anyway to maintain the political ties with Germany, but found himself unable to consummate the marriage.[198] The union progressed in this way until a new lady caught the King's eye in court. That lady was Katherine Howard. Henry's desire for Katherine Howard prompted him to

[197] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[198] Strempel, 16.

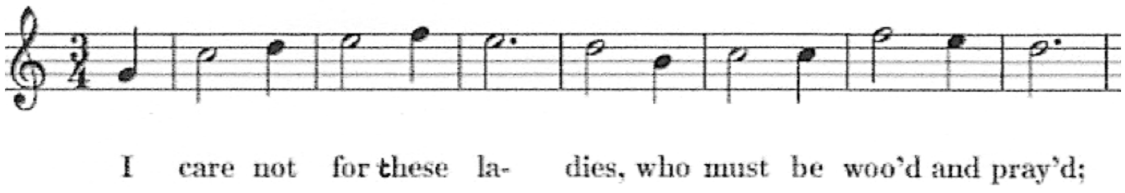
desire a divorce from Anne of Cleves. Knowing the dark history of the wives whom preceded her, she was inclined to accept his offer of divorce. The terms for the divorce stated, "in return for leading a life in England as the king's adopted 'good sister' she would receive a generous settlement."[199] Her letter to the king dated 11 July 1540 is the source for Larsen's shaping the text for the musical portrait of Anne of Cleves.

Musically, Anne of Cleves's song is boisterous and comedic, much like the situation in which she found herself. The lute song used to comment on her situation is Thomas Campion's "I care not for those ladies." A fragment of Campion's melody quoted by Larsen can be seen in Example 28. Textually, the symbolism of Campion's lute song is obvious: Henry clearly did not care for that lady. Used with grating tritones in the accompaniment, the lute song suggests an illustration of the mismatch between Henry and Anne of Cleves (Example 29). Example 29 also shows Larsen's first of many character hints, as the vocal line is marked *as a matter of fact*. Larsen provides character help to the vocalist in this particular portrait. Throughout the vocal line, Larsen gives suggestions about character color, such as *cheerfully* in m. 30, *beaming* in m. 40 and *winking* in m. 55 (Example 30). These character suggestions are just several of the ways Larsen illustrates the comedic aspect of Anne of Cleves's character. The final measures of the song show Anne *winking* and gleefully accepting her position as Anne, daughter of Cleves.

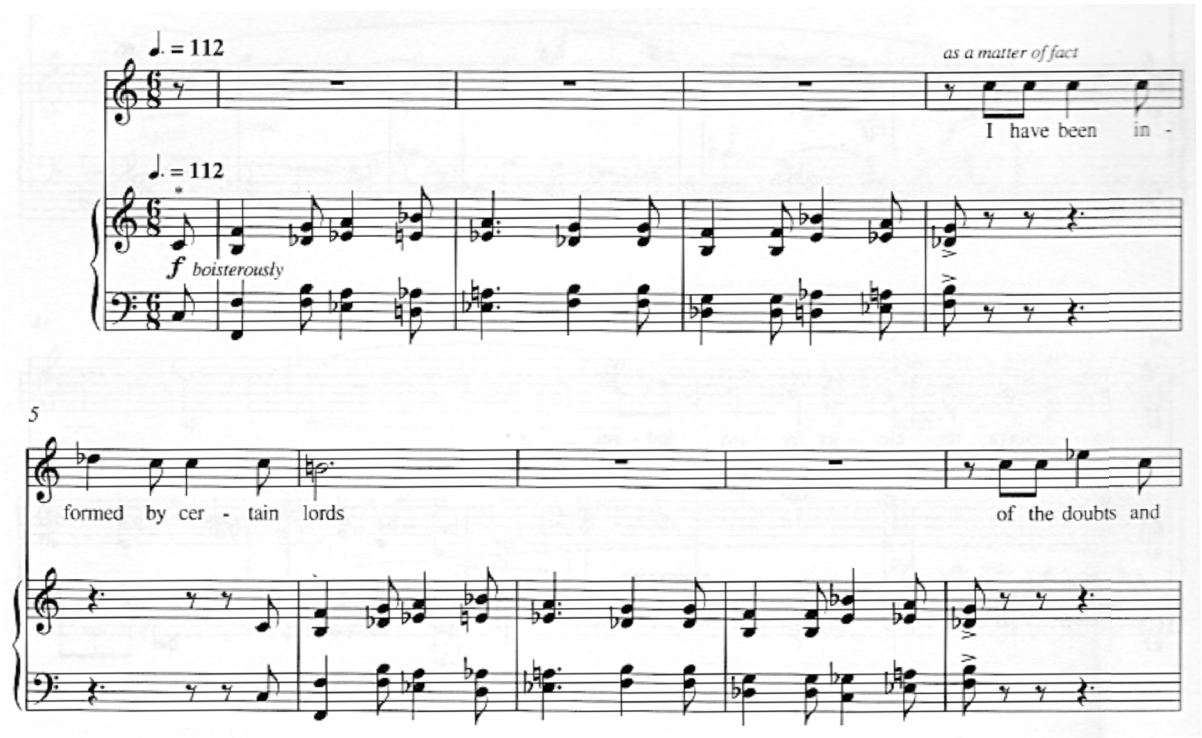
Joy is expressed in this musical portrait because Anne knows she escapes a death sentence from the king. As another aspect of Anne of Cleves's strikingly different outcome compared to the other wives, Larsen distinctly leaves out all bell tolls. They are

[199] Strempel, 16.

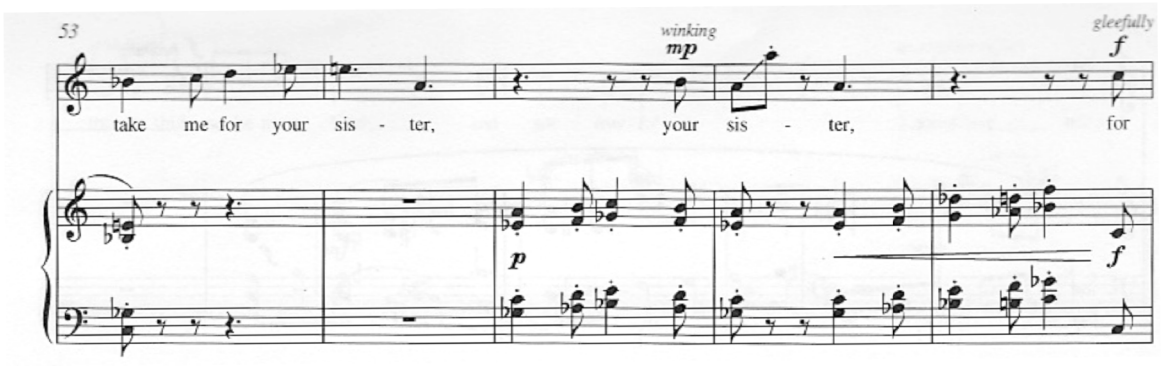
characteristically absent since Anne of Cleves was the one wife to survive past her time as queen. The performer can enhance this difference of character by reveling in the upbeat nature of the music. Gone are the darkness, frustration, and even the idea of tender love. Here instead are feelings of relief and cheer, and the use of a bright and clear vocal timbre by the singer would be a specific vocal tool toward expressing these emotions. By utilizing a brighter vocal color, the singer can further emphasize Anne's cleverness and ease in her highly contrasting situation as queen.



Example 28. Campion, "I care not for these ladies," mm. 1–7.
http://www.8notes.com/scores/3116.asp; Internet, accessed 24 June 2013.



Example 29. Larsen, "Anne of Cleves," mm. 1–9. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 30. Larsen, "Anne of Cleves," mm. 53–57. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

Larsen is careful in shaping this musical portrait as compared to the others of the cycle. Thus far, Larsen has illustrated a dramatic trajectory that emphasizes the overall "curse" that each wife was subject to and achieved their differences by assigning a specific musical color to each portrait. Katherine of Aragon is heard as unrelenting, tense and frustrated in her depiction. Anne Boleyn's contrasting music tells of her defense and non-existent trial, expressed dramatically through her many outcries, quotes from Henry's love letter and solemn walk to the gallows. Jane Seymour's music is a tender and tonal lullaby, with just a hint of dark foreboding in the tritone motives. In each of these depictions, there is an underlying sense of the curse and fate that plagued these previous queens, suggested by Larsen in the textural fabric of the music. In Anne of Cleves's music, that sense of foreboding is absent. By shaping her music without that underlying darkness, Larsen conveys to the listener that Anne of Cleves was the one wife to escape the curse. The absence of the dark foreboding (in either the lack of bell-tolls or in the general boisterous nature of the music) is such a departure from the characterizations of

the other wives that the listener is much more at ease, sensing that this wife will survive her stint as queen.

The fifth and final portrait of the cycle belongs to Katherine Howard. Dramatically, one primary character point at work in this depiction is naïveté. Katherine Howard was likely only seventeen or eighteen when she caught the eye of the king at court. She was of poor lineage and was also sexually experienced, a fact that was not a secret to anyone in court. Despite some evidence of a pre-contract to another man, Henry wed Katherine Howard on 28 July 1541.[200] Katherine proceeded to complicate her situation further by beginning a romance with Thomas Culpepper, a man who served in the king's chamber. Henry became aware of this romance and was publicly humiliated when the rest of the court also learned of Katherine's indiscretion. She was called upon by the Archbishop and was interrogated about her romance. Sadly, her naiveté all but confirmed her fate. Had she admitted that she had a pre-contract before the king wed her, the marriage would have been considered void and her life could have been saved.[201] In her article "*Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII:* Libby Larsen's Royal Portraits of Song," Strempel argues that Katherine did not understand this critical point in her situation and was sentenced to death, in the same place and manner as Anne Boleyn. Both wives went to the Tower gallows and were executed by beheading. The text Larsen uses for this final song is from Katherine Howard's execution speech, recorded on 13 February 1541.

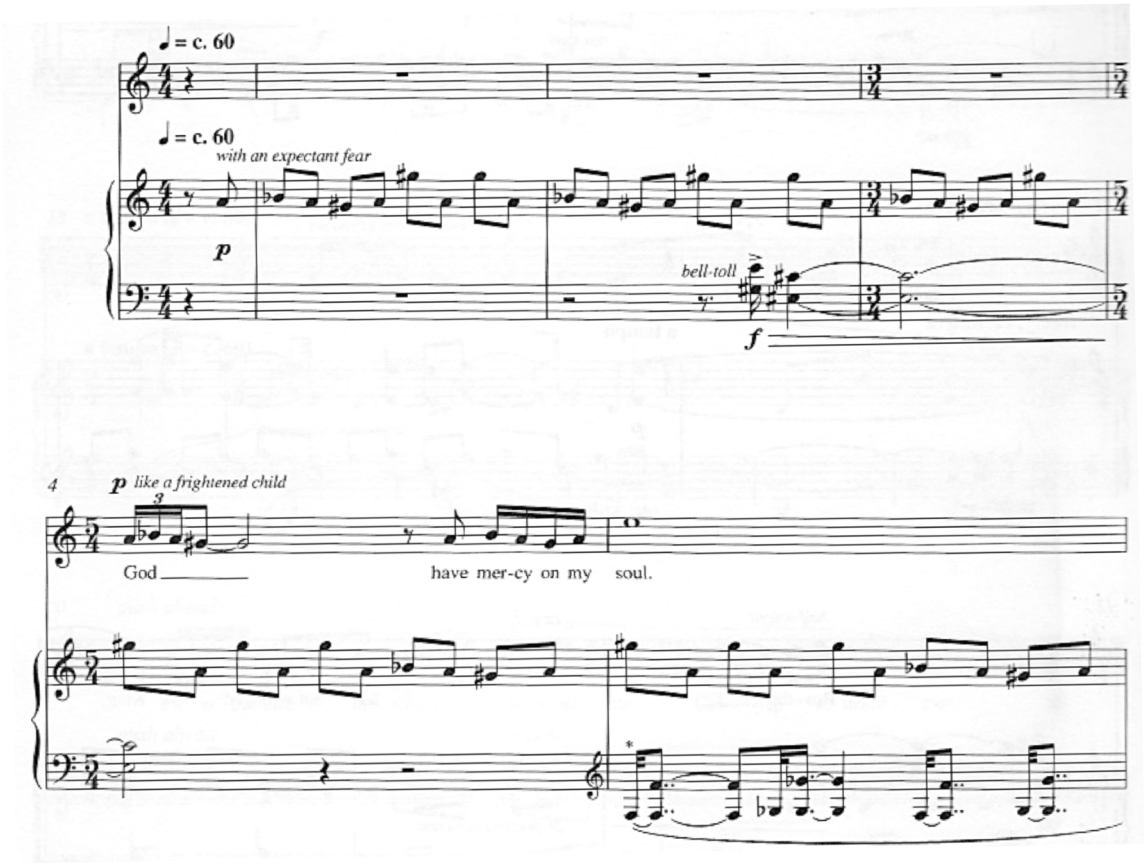
Larsen carefully annotates the score to aid both pianist and singer in creating the frightening environment Katherine felt as she walked toward the gallows. Example 31

[200] Strempel, 17.
[201] Ibid.

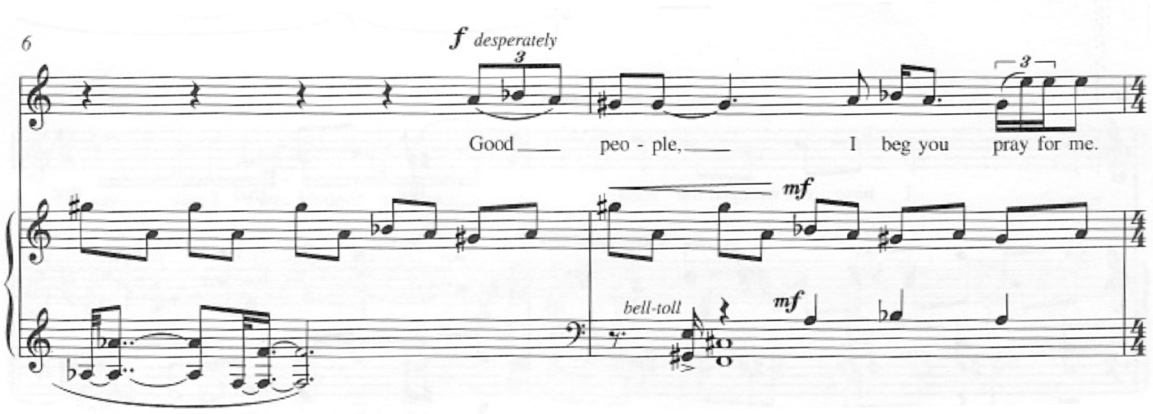
shows the piano line marked *with expectant fear* and the first vocal line "God have mercy on my soul" marked by Larsen as *like a frightened child*. Example 31 also shows the return of the very first lute song heard in the cycle, "In darkness let me dwell" in m. 5. Utilizing the same lute song as Katherine of Aragon, Larsen returns to her use of bell tones, thereby framing the beginning and ending songs (also heard in *Songs from Letters*). The effect of this framing is both auditory and psychological. The auditory response allows the listener to be reminded of how the story began and to feel as sense of emotional closure as the cycle draws to a close. The psychological effect is more dramatic. The framing allows the full trajectory of the drama to be understood. Larsen has told the story of this "curse" that plagued these wives, and the cycle ends much in the same way as it begins, with a sense of isolation and a pleading for the only release from the curse that these women could ask for: death.

As Katherine Howard talks of her own soul, the lute song provides important commentary as her fate darkly portends impending death. While the lute songs remains textually silent, the singer can still use the musical effect of the lute song as subtext or inner monologue in their performance. By calling to mind the text of the lute song while performing, the inner monologue allows the performer an excellent dramatic tool to color her performance. The text of the lute song provides another emotional and psychological tool for the singer. Specifically, this layer of subtext can be expressed by utilizing different vocal colors when the performer is singing and by adding dimension to their acting in the portions of the song where the voice is silent. For example, as seen in Example 31, the first lute song quote comes at a portion during which the voice is holding a whole note E♮ on the text "soul" (m. 5). With the undertone of the lute song as

accompaniment, the singer could color this note with no vibrato or a very pianissimo dynamic, evoking the subtext of "In darkness let me dwell" and incorporating elements of isolation and fear to her vocal quality.



Example 31. Larsen, "Katherine Howard," mm. 1–5. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.



Example 32. Larsen, "Katherine Howard," mm. 6–7. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

Where the bell-tolls were characteristically absent in Anne of Cleves's portrait, they return for Katherine Howard. Here again the bell tolls bring a sense of doom and ill destiny for the young queen, as the vocal line is marked *desperately* (Example 32). Katherine's words illustrate her growing desperation throughout the song. Sections are marked as *freely, recitative* where she pleads her case. The text in this part of the song is as follows:

> I have not wronged the King. Brothers, I have not wronged the King. But it is true that long before the King took me, I loved Thomas Culpepper. I wish to God I had done as Culpepper wished me, for at the time the King wanted me, Culpepper urged me to say that I was pledged to him…If I had done as he wished me, I should not die this death, nor would be.[202]

These words essentially seal her fate. The vocal line is marked *becoming more anguished*, accompanied by an increase in tempo and dynamics (Example 33). Rhythm in the vocal line also provides interesting clues to the emotional content expressed by Katherine. Mm. 22–22 show a distinct dotted sixteenth note rhythm in the vocal line, adding to the sense of desperation felt by Katherine, and hinting at her recognition that perhaps she had made a mistake in her refusal to confess her previous engagement with Culpepper. Mm. 27–33 display another repetition of text, wholly characteristic of Larsen. The repetition of "I wish to God I had done as he wished me, for at the time the King wanted me, Culpepper urged me to say that I was pledged to him" only enhances the importance of this idea in Katherine's mind. She was naïve in her mistake not to claim Culpepper, and in these last moments of her life, she is coming to realize that critical mistake and that realization only intensifies her desperation.

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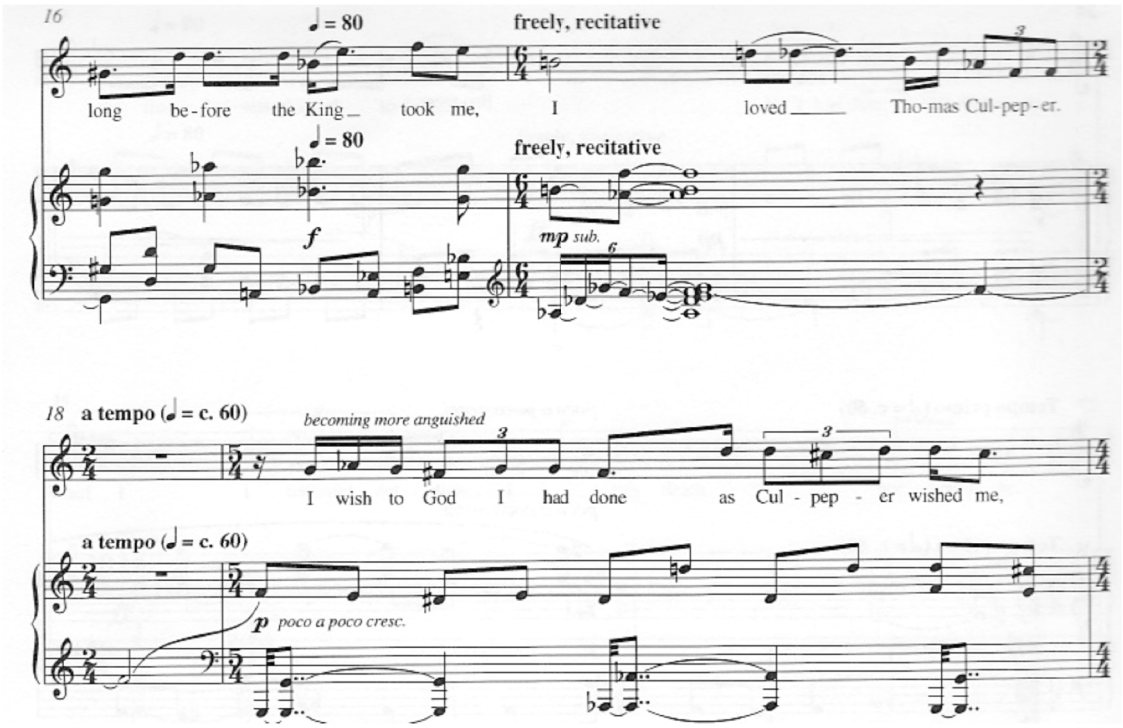
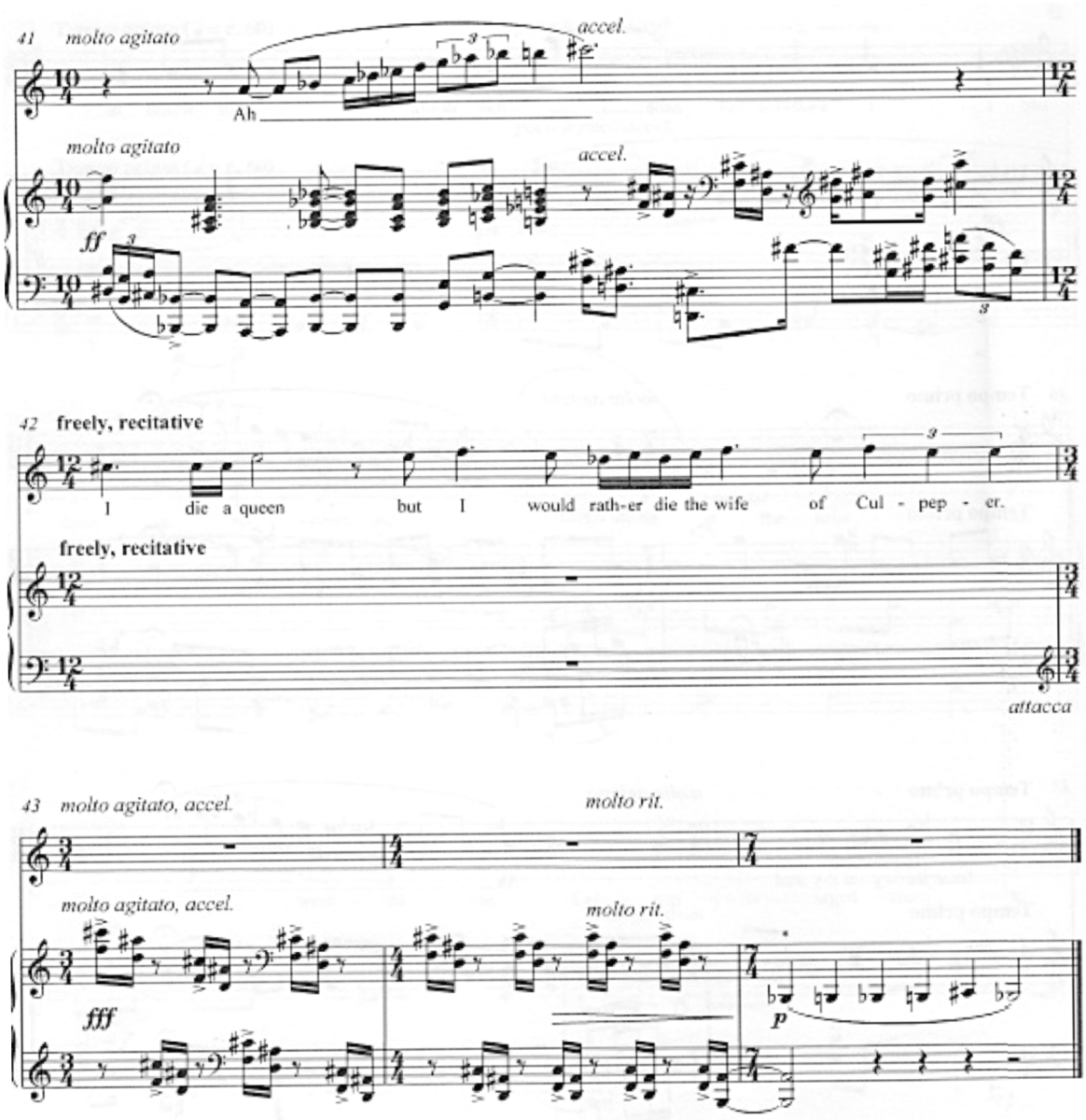
[202] Larsen, 28.



Example 33. Larsen, "Katherine Howard," mm. 16–19. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

The anguish Katherine feels continues to grow until the final bars of the piece, where she makes three, desperate cries to God for mercy. The first two cries in mm. 37 and 39 are exact replicas: a scalar ascent beginning from A4 and ending at B5. As her third and final cry is expressed, the pitch level elevates and the tempo increases in relation to the preceding passage, concluding with the highest note sung in the entire cycle: C#6 (Example 34).



Example 34. Larsen, "Katherine Howard," mm. 41–45. © 2002 Oxford University Press; used with permission.

This highly operatic ending dramatizes the despair Katherine felt as she approached the gallows. Regarding the difficult vocalism of these last lines of the cycle, Larsen did compose an alternate ending that is less strenuous for the singer. But, Larsen herself prefers the ending to be sung as written, as seen in Example 32. She states:

> In composing those phrases, I wanted to create a metaphor for the situation of the queens. I wanted to physically show the danger each queen accepted when she accepted the hand of Henry in marriage. I wanted to show the consequences associated with each queen's choice. I wanted to reveal the stark reality of the acceptance of power as mate and mate as master.[203]

Larsen gives one piece of vocal advice when approaching those particular runs: to begin them slowly and to pace with the momentum of the piano as the run commences.[204] Example 34 also shows the vocal line returning to its free, recitative form. Rather than continuing to plead for her life, Katherine chooses to declare, "I die a queen but I would rather die the wife of Culpeper." This confession follows with the *attacca* marking in the piano after measure 42, bringing the piano accompaniment to an agitated state, symbolizing the falling of the ax. In the last bar of the piece, Larsen annotates again the lute song "In darkness let me dwell," carefully closing the story in a circular motivic effect. The tonal pattern in Larsen's quote at m. 44 is as follows: B ♭ B♮ B ♭ B♮ C# B ♭ . The pattern utilized by Dowland is E F E F G A G# (Example 19). Larsen's quotation is not exact, but nonetheless is a musical reference symbolizing the isolation and tragedy of these women. The framing effect of this motive from Dowland completes the dramatic trajectory of Larsen's storytelling. In the first song of the cycle, Katherine of Aragon's depiction uses the quote from Dowland to comment on her isolation and plea for death. In this final quote, the pleas for death have been heard and answered. All but one wife has died, and the dramatic trajectory comes to its completion, along with the tragic curse.

Throughout the cycle, Larsen's musical material dictates the emotional content. Rhythm, motives, contrasts of recitative and accompaniment, text painting and tempi are several of the musical concepts that color the drama and trajectory of the cycle. The lute

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[203] Strempel, 18.
[204] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.

songs provide important clues to the emotional subtext of each wife, lending dramatic significance and flow as Larsen explores the idea of the curse that befell each of these women.

Larsen's song cycle *Try me, Good King* is a tour de force, a strenuous piece both vocally and emotionally, requiring both strong vocal technique and a clear sense of each of the distinct characters musically and dramatically portrayed. Larsen's setting of these women's words and lives demonstrates her desire to respect and share the stories of strong, female characters. Each musical portrait imagines who these women were, their experiences as queens, and how their brush with power impacted their lives. The musical material Larsen composes dramatically characterizes each female figure. Each characterization deepens the sense that Larsen is dramatically addressing the idea of the "royal curse." The understanding and expression of that dramatic trajectory coupled with specific ideas of vocal pacing and vocal effects give the performance of this cycle a distinct impact. Larsen's use of lute songs and motives and their placement in the musical fabric enhance the drama that permeates this famous historical story. Larsen's careful settings of the queens' own words is crucial to her affinity and respect for the characters she chooses to set to music. By honoring these women with her music, Larsen addresses female experiences through song in a deeply inspired manner.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

As women were gaining footing in this country through feminism, women were also making their way in the compositional field. Women in music found themselves empowered by feminist actions. For example, the second feminist wave had a method of organizing women together in one cause. These organizational efforts impacted women in music as well, encouraging them and empowering them to organize into their own organizations promoting women in music (i.e. The League of Women Composers from 1975 and the American Women Composers, INC. from 1976). By coming together and building a community, the female composers of the 20th century were able to break more gender barriers, emboldened by the advancements from the feminist waves.

The right to vote. The right to own property. Equal pay for women. These are just a few of the major rights gained by the feminist efforts in America. Libby Larsen would add to this list "not asking for permission." This concept of not asking permission (that I have argued) is the central point that connects feminism to the female composer experience. Questions of equality were prominent in the experiences of early American composers like Beach, Gideon, Bauer and Daniels. Feminist pursuit of gender equality played a role in how each composer regarded the use of the term woman composer. Amy Beach was one composer who did not feel limited in any way by her gender. She did her work and wrote her music without asking anyone's permission to do so, connecting her one hundred years later to Libby Larsen. Mabel Daniels acknowledged what she saw as clear differences between men and women in music, preferring to compose in smaller forms, which she considered better suited for her maintain her feminine identity. Bauer used the term woman composer to empower women and to organize them into a

community. In contrast, Gideon felt disdain for the term, wishing to be judged just on her music, not on her gender. Each of these early American composers had a strikingly unique approach to the issues of gender in composition. Their individual approaches to the topic are what make each of their experiences wholly unique.

At the heart of feminism and the female experience are ideas of gender expectations and identity. Women throughout the different waves of feminist activism battled with conflicting problems between establishing equality and also maintaining feminine identity and carrying on with feminine gender roles. These battles were also critical to the experience of female composers. The necessity of raising a family, keeping a home and restrictions in access to musical education all factored into the initial problems felt by women who wished to compose in America. When women were able to break into the compositional field, the prevailing expectations limited their music to smaller forms like parlor songs and solo piano pieces. It wasn't until Amy Beach's *Gaelic Symphony* that women had progressed into larger symphonic forms. By breaking this gender barrier, Amy Beach blazed the way for other female composers to come, including Libby Larsen. Through the groundbreaking efforts of earlier women composers, Larsen found herself in a position to compose anything she desired, and her oeuvre of opera, symphonies, chamber music, vocal music and choral music reflects just that.

In many ways, Larsen's musical compositions honor female experiences. She accomplishes this by consistently choosing text and characters that reflect the strength and perseverance of women in the world. While initially her choices of female characters were not conscious, she gradually came to realize that she did have an affinity for

expressing a sense of female experience in music. Her method for showing her respect for these characters was often to choose texts directly from the women themselves, as is the case with both *Songs from Letters* and *Try Me, Good King.* In these song cycles, Larsen uses words that are known to come directly from Calamity Jane and the wives of Henry VIII. Text setting is central to her song composition. By setting the actual words of these women, she further honors their personal experiences.

There are feminist aspects present in both the experiences of Calamity Jane and the wives. Calamity Jane was a woman largely contrary to the ideological gender expectations of her day. By working jobs as a trick shooter, railroad tracklayer, and pony express rider, she worked jobs typically held by men only. And yet, her kindness and care for children and elderly people were examples of typical feminine characteristics. Child rearing may not have been Jane's strongest suit, but she was a mother and thereby felt the gender expectations that came with bearing children. Her letters to her daughter show her love and also the conflict she felt between balancing her many jobs with her family. The juggling act between career and family is one that modern women today still deal with on a daily basis, and is paramount in contemporary feminine issues. Interestingly, Calamity Jane faced similar problems that modern American women face, despite the century separating her from those modern women.

Musically, Larsen utilizes many tools in her composition to depict the character of Calamity Jane. My discussion of this cycle concentrated on three aspects of her musical writing: Larsen's techniques of character development, her use of musical return and repetition to a psychological end, and her specific placement of motives like tritones, and bell-tolls. The concept of Larsen's character development is particularly critical to

performance, and one that a singer should interpret and understand fully. By pacing the song cycle as Larsen has, with contrasting sections of fast and slow mirroring the contrasting aspects of Jane's character, Larsen hints at vocal pacing and character development for the singer. Repetition and music return provide more clues toward character development, utilized as a metaphor for Jane's memories in her recollections for her daughter. And finally, motivic devises like tritones and bell-tolls are heard throughout, creating auditory and psychological effects for the listener. Each of these musical aspects contributes to Larsen's creation of a specific depiction of this famous character of Calamity Jane.

As for the wives of Henry VIII, the experiences of their stories are very interesting to dissect in dramatic terms. Central to these characters is the question of power. Larsen connects the aspect of royal power to modern feminine ideas by drawing a correlation between royal power and domestic power. Each wife was handed the power of England when they took the king's hand in marriage. By becoming queens, they were given power that sometimes was too much to handle. For Katherine of Aragon, the power came naturally as she was bred to be a queen. For Katherine Howard, her naiveté was such that she couldn't even comprehend the power given her. The concept of domestic power is connected to the gender expectations of child bearing. Perhaps the most critical and life-determining aspect of these women's experiences as queens laid in their ability (or inability) to produce a male heir. For Anne Boleyn, her lack of a male heir all but confirmed her trip to the gallows. For Jane Seymour, the birth of her son Edward was tantamount to creating her own, personal savior. For each of these women, realities of gender roles and expectations were principal in their experiences as queens of England.

Larsen uses her music to fascinating ends to imagine and highlight the experiences of these women. My interpretation concentrated on the dramatic trajectory of the "royal curse" as experienced by each woman. By using a specific lute song for each royal portrait, Larsen creates a subtext commenting on the darker and more dismal sentence that each wife received (with the exception of Anne of Cleves). Comprehending this dramatic trajectory allows the singer better preparation and pacing for the cycle. Larsen carefully annotates her score often, providing characterization ideas for the singer to consider in their interpretation, and these annotations are directly linked to the dramatic trajectory of their stories. Motivic devices again serve auditory and psychological purposes in the cycle. For example, by beginning and ending the cycle with a quote from Dowland's "In darkness let me dwell," Larsen creates dramatic finality and auditory closure for the listener. Larsen's use of the women's own words is the most central and critical aspect of the cycle, and her text-setting helps set up the dramatic and musical trajectories that I have outlined in detail. The words of the wives of Henry VIII as reflected in Larsen's musical depictions convey their experiences in a supportive way that is brimming with honor and respect. Five hundred years later, the words and the experiences they depict still speak to us.

Acknowledging how far women have come in this field can parallel the female experience in music. By breaking barriers of small to large form and by promoting and organizing, women have found a place in modern musical history. Contemporary research is permeated with articles and books on the topic of women in music. Rightfully, women are more represented in compilations and musical texts than they ever have been. Contemporary composers like Larsen strive to honor and highlight the female experience.

While Larsen herself may not be called a political feminist, her ideals reflect her respect and desire to honor women and to also create more repertoire for female singers. By writing songs about women for women, Larsen shows her innate affinity for characterizing women and female experiences. Her own feminist experiences informed this development as a woman writing for women. She was emboldened by the second wave of feminism to find her own community of support and to make her way into the world of serious musical composition. The feminist concept of never asking permission is what drove and inspired her to pursue this path in the male-centric world of composition. "Once you stop asking for permission, you are free."[205]

The freedom Larsen found continues to be source of inspiration for young women in music today. She gives much advice to young women wishing to pursue music in today's musical climate. Her inspiring words draw upon that one, critical mantra: not asking permission. "The key is not asking permission. Go around the gate. Gather people around you who want to sing and do what you want to do. Being an entrepreneur is really important. And do it with dignity. You have dignity because you are doing your own thing."[206] Dignity and courage are Larsen's advice for women in music. By inspiring young women with her words and music, Larsen continues to raise women up by promoting and sharing these wholly unique feminine experiences.

[205] Libby Larsen, Interview by Meredith Du Bon, 27 April 2011, St. Paul, MN.
[206] Ibid.

APPENDIX A
TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH LIBBY LARSEN
APRIL 27, 2011 – ST. PAUL, MN

"Where words and music become something new, that's where you find me."

[Where did your musical education begin?]

I went to Christ the King School and Southwest High School in Minneapolis. My musical education began with Gregorian chant in Catholic school, where I also studied piano and sang in the choir. In high school, I sang in the choir and did a brief stint with a garage band. I was in college 1968-1978 at the University of Minnesota. I grew up during the push for the second wave of Women's Lib so I arrived at college ready to challenge the status quo. I was also shaped by the Second Vatican Council when I was in 6th grade.

[How did the Second Vatican Council shape you?]

By the time I was 12 years old, religious practices had already had a profound impact on me. With the Second Vatican Council, traditional church practices were completely revamped and the nuns seemed furious. Although the nuns didn't say it, you could tell they were furious by their little actions here and there. I was also furious because I loved those traditional rituals. I thought hard about why they would change those rituals and what we could do about it. But did women have any significant voice in the Catholic Church? None that I could find. I arrived at high school ready to question things deeply. I probably got kicked out of CDC because I asked why a merciful God would create a hell. That's the source of all my compositions: asking difficult questions of myself.

In high school, I asked difficult questions of my teachers and offered to help them to find their answers through actions. For instance, we had a dress code that was enforced until the end of my senior year. Part of the code dictated that skirts be worn and that the length be between the floor and the girl's knees. The code also dictated no sleeveless shirts and no blue jeans. We were on the cusp of a big societal change. I went with a group of friends to the administration asking for change. They asked us to convince them and so we organized a fashion show for them to show them what we as a student body felt was appropriate dress for school. That action changed the dress code.

Another example: I had a substitute biology teacher named Dr. Odin who was the only African American teacher I had growing up. He was a brilliant teacher. He told us about his band, which played at the Ebony Bar in St. Paul. My dad took me there and the music was rocking. I went to my music teacher and asked if we could bring this band in for an all-school assembly. He refused. This was the 1960s, a time when people saw "black" music as a danger to white cultural values. So I asked my principal to bring the band in. My principal agreed and the assembly rocked.

[What were some of your experiences like relating to the feminist movements?]

I was an undergraduate from 1968 to 1971 when the Women's Lib movement was just gaining steam. In graduate school, I wasn't successful at landing a music theory teacher's assistantship at the University of Minnesota. I knew of only one female professor at the School of Music, Donna Cardamone Jackson. She was a brilliant young musicologist with a doctorate from Harvard. I walked into her office and introduced myself. She probably already knew who I was. I blurted out that I admired her and that I needed her help and she made me her TA in music history until I started working on my doctorate. It provided me with financial resources to pursue composition and also the opportunity to be mentored by a very strong woman, someone who was threading the needle of feminism by succeeding in the male-dominated world of academia. She was terribly threatening to the "old boys" who had been around for 30 years. I realize now, she also needed support; she was actively involved in many campus issues that she handled with grace and care. I really became aware of women's issues through working with her. As the Women's Lib movement was unfolding, I was working with her in her office. We would often discuss various issues swirling about the discourse.

I started writing in all genres, including symphonic works. As for writing for female voice, I set standard poems that allowed me to lean on the strength of the poet while I figured out what music had to do with it. I set some good poetry and also wrote some of my own. I did my master's thesis on *Charlotte's Web* (an opera) and my doctoral thesis on Yeats.

I didn't make a conscious decision to write through women's voices. I was going to enter the world of male world of serious musical composition. I started looking for role models who lived a life of excellence, integrity, professionalism, and constant output. I wanted to know how they lived. I started looking at artists like Georgia O'Keeffe, Mary Cassatt, Joanne Bartlett. I got to know women composers like Thea Musgrave and Pauleen Oliveros. I started to seek a community where I would feel safe intellectually.

When I graduated, I knew I wanted to compose and work with great performers but I was still searching for what I really wanted to say. My first public commission came about through the Prairie Home Companion's first national broadcast. For them, I composed a kind of baroque concerto grosso for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Powdermilk Biscuit Band. Later, I received a commission from soprano Thea Ingleson. She wanted a song cycle for clarinet, piano and voice, and I suggested we take Georgia O'Keeffe for our inspiration because I felt an affinity for her work. That piece became a chamber work for viola, piano and clarinet entitled *Black Birds, Red Hills.* After that, I recognized that I was beginning to find my compositional voice by seeking the essence of what it's like to be alive now, in our fluid American culture.

Later on, I began to be invited to give master classes and participate in composer residences at colleges and universities. One such invitation came with a request that I give a talk about my affinity for setting texts written by women. I initially thought, "What? I have an affinity?" Turns out I do. I am a woman. The texts that women write to represent themselves, whether prose or poetry, tend to be authentic, honest, and direct. Men tend to distance themselves from the emotion of the text by creating a frame. With

texts written by men, the speaker is almost always a universal being whereas with women it's much more common to have a concrete, personal speaker. You can also see this in their personal interactions. When men get emotional, they pat each other on the back. Women (with exceptions) generally will just sit down and talk to each other.

After it was pointed out to me, I realized I did have an affinity for texts written by women. Then I started thinking about actively seeking texts with this kind of poetic "authenticity," texts where the author is making a strong statement from the self. I found I wanted to add to the repertoire for female voice by pursuing this and allowing the singer to become the speaker of the text.

Songs from Letters was the first time I consciously enacted this philosophy. I had already unconsciously moved in that direction with *Cowboy Songs,* an earlier song cycle. One of the songs in the cycle, "Bucking Bronco," has this sense of poetic "authenticity." The poem is attributed to Belle Starr. When I read it, I thought, "I know what this is," just as Mary Cassatt, when challenged by Degas, replied that she didn't need a model to draw the curve of a woman's back. I set it instinctually. A person was coming through these words. A real person. So when I began *Songs from Letters,* I knew what kind of texts I found most compelling. I was reading a book of letters to daughters and the inspiration for *Songs from Letters* just leapt off the page. They are great words. Scholarly evidence suggests Calamity Jane might not have written those words. But it doesn't really matter; it is a real person and a real character.

So to answer your question, I think that my connection to feminism, as I look back to where it started and where I am, was that I decided that the best thing I could do was to live a life of constant public display of the products of my brain. I wanted to work with great performers who perform for audiences of people dedicated to listening. The strongest thing I could do was to never ask permission but to just do it. The greatest lessons I learned as part of the second wave of feminism were the importance of equal pay and to never ask permission. Once you stop asking permission from the system, you are free.

[How did you deal with being in this field and being such a minority? How did you go about proving yourself?]

I let go of trying to prove myself. I didn't enter any competitions. Why? Because it is asking for permission and approval. I just do my work.

I also never wanted to participate in the feminist anger that was part of that second wave. I understand bitterness toward men, especially in my mother's generation, a generation that lived a radical existence in the post-WWII era. My opera *Picnic* (2009) is an exploration of that world.

[Who would call your major musical influences in song?]

Back in the *Cowboy Songs* era, I liked Ned Rorem's work because of the natural way he sets the English language. It is the pre-WWII English that surrounded him. It is American English, but not the American English we speak. It was influenced by Western European syntax and flow. I felt that Ned Rorem's music flowed directly from the American English texts he set.

I have always been interested in authentic songwriters like Chuck Berry, Big Mama Thornton, Bessie Smith, and Little Richard. It is because their lyrics are in American English, English influenced by a hodgepodge of East African and Western European syntax and flow. When I set text, my first draft is free of meters because I want to stay true to the flow of the words. I learned this in grade school when singing and writing Gregorian chant. I also admire Lee Hoiby, Chester Biscardi, and of course, my teacher Dominick Argento. Of course I became interested in the origins of rock and roll and I study and admire all kinds of rock bands, but particularly groups that were famous when I was in my twenties, including Tower of Power, Chicago, REO Speedwagon, Bob Seeger, and Bonnie Raitt.

I am drawn to great artists who express themselves in authentic American forms, like hip-hop, gospel, early country western, and blues. This is where I find words and music become something new and can no longer be separated from each other.

The more I worked with American English texts, the more frustrated I became with the world of vocal pedagogy. Proper vocal technique is designed to prepare you to sing repertoire with texts that are not in American English. If we are looking to form good singing habits, we ought to be able to develop vocal technique that naturally facilitates singing in our own vernacular.

[What about the alternative cadenza in "Katherine Howard" from *Try Me, Good King* discussed in Eileen Strempel's article?]

The original, preferred ending of Katherine Howard stretches the range higher than the other songs. Certain singers may want to use the alternate ending to benefit their voices.

[Let's talk about *Try Me, Good King*. My interpretation of the lute songs is to use them as inner monologue and thereby an acting technique.]

Let me tell you a bit about *Try Me, Good King.* It was a commission from the Marilyn Horne Foundation for Meagan Miller. I chose the story of Henry VIII and his wives because I have been perpetually fascinated by it and its theme of power and the discarded wife. I composed the songs while President Clinton was being impeached for lying about adultery. It seemed clear to me that the wives of Henry VIII were a perfect object of contemplation for our modern day. Rather than focusing on Henry's dilemma, as many depictions do, I wanted to let these extraordinary women speak for themselves. These were smart, strong, self-directed women who still speak to us five hundred years later.

I'm glad you found the subtext in the lute songs. Anyone who finds this will really know these songs. My pieces always arrive in my brain full-blown. I love lute songs and I found myself particularly drawn to them as a source of inspiration. I knew that the lute songs were written in the Elizabethan Era [1558-1603], and we always think of them in connection to courtly love. But why couldn't they be encoded cultural messages, in the way that spirituals are? So I adopted lute songs like "I care not for these ladies" and "If my complaints could passions move" as subtexts to the queens' words. After all, it wasn't just a domestic drama between Henry and his wives. This was a mess that consumed the whole society at the time.

[Do you have any advice for singers wishing to embark on singing your repertoire?]

Here are three things. One: get your ear ready. I am very careful about giving you references to pitch, but not in the obvious ways. And so you need to be prepared to relate linearly to the music to feel secure in the pitches. If you aren't prepared to listen that way, you will feel at sea about where your pitches are. I do not directly support the vocal line. My musical writing is Western European but post-classic. The second piece of advice is to practice your consonants and be prepared to use them. Enunciate! And finally the third bit of advice is to practice your stamina, pacing yourself as you sing. In my later works, you really have to pace yourself. I write for advanced performers: graduate student and professional level vocalists.

[How does song composition differ from orchestral and instrumental writing?]

With the exception of *Black Birds*, I compose idiomatically for the instrument at hand. I compose for instruments quite differently from the way I compose for voice.

[Do you find a subtext for your instrumental writing?]

Yes! I find subtexts depending on the instruments and the piece at hand. For instance, scatting. If you write scat for the violin, you have something new. Another example of this is *Holy Roller* [1997]. That piece is influenced by revivalist preaching. The saxophone part uses the whole instrument, inflecting it with revivalist preaching techniques: tempo stretching, range, and jumping into falsetto, etc. That piece is entirely text influenced, but there isn't a word in it and you could never sing it. So, the instrumental writing tends to challenge the instruments for which the work is written.

My vocal writing challenges the singers, but not necessarily the vocal instrument. If I were to challenge instrument itself, I would ask for vocal fry, pops, clicks, and all sorts of things that the voice can do naturally but is not part of our vocal pedagogy.

[What are some techniques for interpretation of your vocal music?]

I just coached a bunch of songs at a university. They were good singers and great teachers. Many were undergraduate students and it was a great opportunity to hear them. The thing I had to coach out of each singer is the idea that dynamics rise and fall with

pitches. This is a romantic performance practice which does not necessarily apply to music of our times. If a singer uses this romantic technique where it is not called for, in my music, it actually may change the meaning of the words. The music comes from the words. If the singer has thought carefully about the text from the standpoint of meaning, the singer will avoid an interpretation informed by standard repertoire.

A singer also needs to get control of the pit. If the pit musicians don't understand singing dynamics and are not conducted to do so, the singer must work with the conductor to adjust them.

[Can you give any words of wisdom to young women in music in this time?]

Walk through any door as yourself. Meet every situation at the crossroads of respect. There are skills involved. Be vigilant about what you need and insist on getting it. If someone says no, go to someone else. Find people to work with you. It is about self-realization. Young women in music now are in the same boat (in classical music, not popular music). Learn from the entrepreneurial spirit of women in pop music. They are getting themselves out on YouTube, working on marketing themselves.

There are too many excellent musicians for the classical music system to absorb, especially singers. It is the same with composition. This is America's problem. We built this huge manufacturing system: music education. Yet there are no jobs. I guess a singer who knows this and yet continues to train does so because that's what they have to do. It may be immoral to keep training singers with such a limited job market, but it is authentic for the singer to pursue what they love. Here is my advice for singers. Picture your life five or ten years from now and ask yourself this question: how can I continue singing? It may not be within this system. It is also a matter of creating your own opportunities. Ask yourself: how would I like to be singing? If you love opera, maybe you should start your own company. Maybe it is an online company. There are so many things that your generation has invented to bypass the old decaying system.

The key is not asking permission. Go around the gate. Gather people around you who want to sing and do what you want to do. Being an entrepreneur is really important. And do it with dignity. You have dignity because you are doing your own thing.

[What are some conventions in your music?]

When choosing texts, I pay attention to the way the rhythm of the words interacts with textual meaning. I try to set texts as naturally as I can.

Another convention would be hidden meanings such as the bells in the *Try Me, Good King*. There are a vast number of symbolic meanings for bells, depending on the song.

[Who are the most inspiring women to you?]

Eleanor of Aquitaine, Babe Zaharias, Elizabeth I, Mary Cassatt, Georgia O'Keeffe, Bessie Smith, Big Mama Thornton, every female nurse and doctor, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Augusta Holmès, Lady Mary Sidney.

APPENDIX B

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