Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano
(for performance artist and quadraphonic tape)

William Osborne (1997)

A spot rises on the "Mad Soprano" standing profile, center stage, her arms and gaze raised upward at 80 degrees.

She lowers her arms (pos. 1)**, turns to public (pos. 2), makes one step forward and bow (pos. 3).

She takes her trombone and plays in the spot center stage, facing the front.

Quietly majestic

Then facing left:

*White diamond notes are of indefinite duration.  **Pos. 1: Elbows bent at approx. 45 degrees, hands shoulder height.  Pos. 2: Arms lowered but with elbows slightly bent, open palms facing public, face calm, innocent and joyful.

She places the trombone on its stand and seats herself on the bench.

She rummages in her bag for her score.

Pos. 1: One step forward, as arms open wider from sides in graceful greeting to public.
She finds it sitting to her right and picks it up.

To mor row is my au di tion!
(always slightly accent the downbeats to lend the text metricity)

Confidentially, whispered like a secret:

She rambles in her bag for a pencil.

I won der what they'll do? I lied about my age!

Troubled:

She flips the pages of her score.

I feel un pre pared!

Ditto.

Ditto.

She holds the score up with weary annoyance and lowers it in line with the music, then tosses it down.

*Reminder: Act like the words are your genuine concerns.*
With a heavy irony, she takes a scarf from her bag, and shakes it out.

What am I going to wear? Armor? Or shackles? My scarf? There's

Tossing away her concerns, and tossing her scarf over her neck, she waxes optimistic: She takes the score and sings from "Lucia" in a highly stylized manner:

nothing to be done. I'll just give it my best. Cast on my

Cluck. grave a flower, But let there be no weeping, When 'neath the turf I'm sleep -

She dissolves out of the aria, and tosses the score down.
In a nervous tick, she tightens the scarf around her neck, bunching about one third of it up into her hands. She bunches another third of the scarf.

How am I going to sing to-mor-row? I'm horse! No voice!

She bunches the final third. She rises and walks downstage center as close to the public as possible. Complete crossfade to only her upper body.

I'm lost!

She enjoys gossiping about "Betty" and addresses specific members of the public with intimate, whispered knowledge. She addresses another member of the public.

Soon I'll be just like Betty. She lives in the box down the street.

To another member.

She bunches the final third of her scarf. She throws her hands up, suddenly worried, the scarf falls loose. She grasps her throat.

She won't sing a note, nothing at all. Me too! I should save my voice! But I need to prepare.

With a touch of exuberance:
The light completely crossfades to the center stage spot as she takes about three steps backwards to it and transforms into her opera character.

As if on the stage of the Met, portando la voce.

For mad the fields of a - a - zure I go to wait for

him, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes, 'Mid fields of a - zure I wait for him, ah yes, ah

Dissolving from her arie, she moves back downstage center to the public. Light completely crossfades.

Annoyed: Somewhat despairing: The tick with the scarf.

It's hope-less! This is just howl-ing.

Tick. She glides backwards a couple steps, turns, releases the scarf, and walks the rest of the way to the bench, and seats herself.

They'll ne - ver list - en.
With her hand close to her face, she addresses the public while delicately conducting the beat.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.

Tick with the scarf.

She laughs operatically.

With a giddy confidence:

We are perplexed but not in despair.

Tomorrow is my special day!

She flits through the score.

With exuberance:

What am I going to sing?

What will I do if I make the last round?

She tosses the score down and rummages vigorously in her bag.
She pulls a letter out of her bag and removes it from its envelope on the last note of the rummage music. She holds the folded letter up, contemplating it with a certain wonderment.

She unfolds the letter, and reads with great anticipation:

Dear applicant,

Time: Four-thirty five.

Please use the back entrance.

I look and sound ridiculous.

I haven't got a chance. There I'll stand. All alone. Just me.

For mid the fields of azure I go to wait for him, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes,
She dissolves from the aria. 

Somewhat weary and distant, reflective:

My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.

She slowly turns 45 degrees to the right to face an opera light she imagines is shining down upon her.

She mimes singing an aria in the direction of the "light," right arm raised, mouthing words in time with the music. The actual spot on her becomes very bright as the melody ascends.

As she finishes her fantasy, the light dims to its normal intensity in line with the falling figure.

Subdued:

She gestures to her clothing:

Will I be presentable? (continue slightly accenting the downbeats.)

These are only rags.

Suddenly taking heart:

I'll sing it all for them. As if as and Lied-er.

She mimes singing as before, this time facing left with her left arm raised. The actual light gradually becomes very intense.

As she leaves her fantasy the lights dim.

She appears to be thinking of something new.

She addresses her public:

May-be... maybe they'd like to hear something... something original.
She takes a man's old, black, wing tip shoe from her bag, and holds it before her, one hand at the toe, the other at the heel.

Whispered very confidentially:

I could sing a-bout Bet-ty.

It's a VERY pri-va-tee stor-y.

My old friend Bet-ty was re-pair-ing her daugh-ter's bike, when her hus-band start-ed bel-low-ing.

She lowers her head in a kind of shame and fear.

He came out hold-ing some shoes that she was to have pol-ished.

She raises her head and resumes singing:

He could n't say what he want-ed be-cause I was there, so he re-peated:

With an in-creas-ing tone of fear and anger:

and held them high-er and more de-mand-ing-ly.

She goes completely down-stage center to the audience. Complete cross-fade to only her upper body.

Warm and gentle

She smiles, egotistical, child-like. Almost stepping out of the drama, she sings the following phrases, each to a different individual in the public, in a warm, soft, lyrical voice.

You could bear with

She sings, relishing the gossip, but with hints of her own fear, anxiety and anger: Cantable and lilting, but intimate and fearful.
Pleading slightly:

me a little

in my folly

and indeed bear with me.

Dark and mystical:

She takes two gliding steps backwards, turns, goes to the bench, sits, takes her score and starts to study it. Complete crossfade to bench.

She lowers the score to her lap in dark contemplation...

...then resumes studying it.

She tries the aria again:

But let there be no weeping.

When 'neath the turf I'm sleeping.

Frustrated, she slams the score shut,

reopens it, frustratedly flits through the pages.

then contemplatively lowers it to her lap.

She sets the score aside, pauses a moment in thought,

then takes the shoe and holds it as before.
and that is all we can sing.

But of course, I could NOT sing! And just sit here and be a si-lient, think-ing head.

And then I sing and there I am a-gain,

sud-den-ly raised to breath and con-crete form, no end in sight, thun-der-ing a-long like some-thing real, some-thing vis-i-ble and sol-i-d.

And then I'm si-lient, and I fade a-way in-to the dark-ness.
Just like in a dream... as it were.

But then one might ask, if I'm not real

As a matter of course:

who is this not sing-ing?

For some-times I just keep the beat you know.

Of course I should hope that I'm imagining such a condition as this,

but it's not unimaginable that I'm not.

Somewhat astounded:

She gestures at herself:

Conclusively:

She goes to her trombone (or alternative), takes it to center stage—light brightens center stage.
She plays her trombone, occasionally breaking off to address the public.

Virtuoso

She waltzingly sways her horn from side to side.

Waltzing

Looking at her horn, quite perplexed:

Will this help my audition?

Or am I spreading myself to thin?

Looking at the audience:
Driving

She coyly covers her mouth in "alarm" over the sudden, loud, flatulent note, then steps forward and addresses the audience.

\[ \text{mf} \quad \text{call} \quad \text{somewhat flatulent} \]

And then I stop playing and suddenly I'm gone again, back to a somber thread of silence.

Looking at her instrument:

- She steps back to the center stage.
- She waltzingly sways her horn from side to side.

\[ \text{Waltzing} \quad \text{not even my horn real.} \]
She looks at her instrument:

Such a noble instrument!

mf

She moves the instrument as if playing "La Cucaracha."

I suppose it could make an impression

la la la la la la

Becoming carried away:

She snaps out of her reverie, and realizes she must return to practice.

mf

She turns profile.

 mf

Curtain close

Xylophone

-18-
I hope this is leading to something more than my usual collected.

She moves from center to address the audience--complete crossfade.

These are the problems I have singing what I want to say, when I finally know that I want to...
She remains standing in the spot, gentle and impassive, then returns to the bench.

(These gestures are not directed to the public, but to herself, for her own amusement.)

She pulls her scarf/shawl tighter in response to the thunder, and sits quietly wondering what to do.

She murmurs quietly to herself and sways from side to side with the music.

It begins to rain. The light dims. She pulls her scarf more closely about her.

It's jammed. She struggles to open it.

She takes her umbrella (about 4 beats after the beginning of the thunder.)

It opens on the sfz. She holds the position for a moment.

She puts the umbrella over her head.

She cheerfully sings to keep herself happy—thoughtfully, as if formulating a view.

No sense being a sorry sight at this point.

No dumb or dol-drum to weigh things down.

Full of wit and joyous-ly.

(Dance motions.)
As the light crossfades to a general light brightest at the center, she stands, takes two waltzing steps to center stage, fully extends her right arm with her umbrella in her right hand, waltzes two steps to her right, then two back to center, then twirls one complete rotation.

The jesters at the feast.

She lowers the umbrella to her shoulder, stops dancing and sings center stage.

She extends her umbrella arm as before, gracefully twirls one full rotation to the left without changing her position, then returns the umbrella to her shoulder.

She twirls right in the same manner. On the word "joy" she fully extends her right arm and the umbrella at about a 60 degree angle.

She remains in...

Ban the maggoty mis'ries of stray cats.

 mf

Shoot the ghouls who grin with ghastly smiles.

(smmpre smpile)

And set yourself upon a spire of joy.

mf

...this exuberant pose for a moment, but the thunder dampens her enthusiasm. She slowly lowers the umbrella to her shoulder, and moves front center--complete crossfade of light.

She addresses individuals in the public:

I'm not saying we have a lot to sing,

mf

but I am saying what we do sing, is

Xylophone

She makes two slow dream-like twirls back to center stage in line with the falling music--complete crossfade to center stage. Her mood transforms as she imagines the aria she is about to sing.

She enters the role of "Adrianna" and sings with her eyes closed.

Las- cia-te mi morire
Her aria dissolves like slowly awakening from a dream with disappointment and confusion.

She returns to her "cheerful" state, but a little more subdued.

On the word "life" she extends the arm holding her umbrella as before.

She holds that pose as she gently sways side to side with the music. (If necessary she can move slightly to find the most attractive light.)

She coyly looks up at the thunder and lowers her umbrella to her shoulder.
She moves to a spot about three meters downstage right. The light crosses to a spot only on her upper body. Long pause as she impassively looks at the public. She speaks with such calm dignity that she almost breaks out of her drama. (During the pause, as she waits for the cues, she continues to impassively looks at the audience.)

First low gliss. Sometimes I think people are listening. Short pause. Or am I only imagining?
Cascade. I thought I heard them breathing. Short pause. It's really me who's beaten.
Whispers. He does it for his—short pause—satisfaction.
Second low gliss. I don't remember people anymore. She stands impassively looking at the audience.

Wind.

Andante calmo

I dearly love those flowers, they delight and enchant me, they speak to me of love, of love and spring time,

They speak to me of dreams and of illusions; of those wonders the world would call poetic. Do you understand me?

The lights will rise on me, all doubts will fall aside,

And I'll sing from my heart,

But... but what will I sing about?

She leaves her role, steps front center stage, and addresses individuals in the public—complete crossfade of light.

Hesitantly, doubting:
She moves to the same spot three meters downstage right. The light cross fades to only her upper body. Long pause as she impassively looks at the public. She speaks with the same dignity as before.

Cascando. If I stay here, he'll beat me for singing. But I have to practice. Tomorrow, I'll be all bloody.

Cascando. That's why I think of Mozart playing billiards.

Cascando. One ball hitting the other, and on and on by perfect chance till all is silence.

Cascando. That's what it's like here at night.

Whispers. I hear all those little sounds.

Whispers. A click here, a clack there, till stillness reigns.

Wind.

complete crossfade of light.

She takes the shoe and holds it before her as earlier.

That's when the plot thick-end. She said:

Took the shoes and dumped them in the frog pond. He didn't like that.

You don't need a mother anymore.

She holds the shoe before her in horrific memory. On the snip sound her head slowly jerks to the side, then she raises her hand to touch her face.

She stands in silence, impassively looking at the public.

She returns to the bench.
She goes to the audience, downstage center--
complete crossfade to only her upper body.

With an impassive dignity, but dark and somewhat incredulous.

She remains motionless. The light slowly fades to darkness in line with the music.

During the blackout return to the bench, place some blood in the palm of each hand and on the corner of the mouth.

It's getting dark. Tonight, Betty will be beaten.

The music continues in darkness. She raises her arms above her head.

The bench spot slowly rises to a very dim light in line with the crescendo of the low drone. She sways her arms from side to side like wheat in the wind.

She lowers her arms.

The light rises to a fuller intensity in line with the high drone. She takes a paper tissue from her bag, wipes the blood from her hands, then from her mouth as she winces slightly. She picks up her hat, brushes it off, straightens it out, and sets it aside.

Today is my audition.

Last night, Betty was beaten.

She'll tell them it's her stage make-up.
She moves downstream right and assumes the "noble" pose described in appendix 3. As the high C drone begins she looks up to her imagined gallery. Crossfade to general stage right.

Cantabile, quiet and suspended

These pitiful words, carreeing out of heart or gut,

The span of mandible and height of teeth,
She looks upward as the high drone begins.

Lips locking and unlocking verbs and loves, spat up beyond the cave of mouth.

She moves to downstage center and assumes the fourth pose as the light crossfades.

She looks upward as before.

With these workings of timid

Flute

She makes eye contact with the public.

tissue, and resonated gases

We declare our love.

As the center stage spot fades in, she takes several dream-like operatic bows while slowly stepping backwards toward the bench. Then she takes her trombone and moves to center stage—completely crossfade to center stage.

She plays the trombone, facing slightly stage left.

Cantabile and espressivo
She returns the trombone to its stand and sits on the bench.

She addresses her imagined public, calm, dignified, but slightly bitter. With a hint of metricity:

(Wait about three beats.) **mf**  Sometimes they look at me, and sometimes they applaud... like when watching pigeons. They feel better for it, then walk on. It's not art. It's a question of... entertainment. I lie here in my smelly rags, surrounded with refuse from my bags. Then before they disappear through the grids and tubes of the city...
...they stand and stare an instant, because they think I'm... dead.

With a sense of anger:

ALL homeless. Shall I crawl on my stomach and beg for some thing to sing? Shall I crawl on my stomach and sing?

Very matter of fact, she takes her scarf.

No, I shan't soil my out-fit. I have to go to my audition soon.

She becomes lost in her thoughts, an abstracted reverie.

Cantabile

She momentarily looks at the heavens then back to the public.

Holding on to the heavens that they wound'n't fall, my sky Atlas tires, not knowing that as she sleeps the stars pass. 
She angrily tosses the shoe into the gutter.

She rises with her gaze directed slightly downward and moves toward center stage. After a step or two her face slowly sweeps upward to the center stage light which is slowly crossfading in. Completely crossfade to center stage light.

We'll sing e-ing: ing in...

...sings to the light which gradually increases to laser-like intensity by the high point of the melody.

The light slowly fades to normal intensity.

She returns to the bench and sits. Complete crossfade.

She sings without words.

Cantabile, apassionata

She raises her clenched fists above her head as her voice moves to an almost scream-like effect by the high C.
She nervously cogitates with building intensity.

Each group of statements between the "hammers" is self-contained, conveying a sense of desperate finality, but then more thoughts arise.

With desperate finality

It's time for my au-di-tion, and I'm wor-ried I'll ne-ver sing a-gain. How will I live? Sit here and be pretty? I'll

Factually, but angry:

Inflect the word "something" as if having great doubt about what it might be.

With increasing desperation, becoming almost a shout:

just have to go un-pre-pared, with-out a song, noth-ing to show for my-self. No. I can't do that. I'll work on some-thing. A piece to keep me go-ing. I don't know what to do.

She stands and slowly walks to center stage as she sings. Her arms gradually rise upward until they are extended at about a 45 degree angle when she sings the G--crossfade of light to center stage.

There's no time left.

Do you know what it means to be with-out a song? People will step on you.

(Greatly increase the amp volume.)

Her arms slowly lower, then she walks completely downstage center and looks at the audience--complete crossfade of light.

Softly, in a hoarse voice: (short) She turns, walks to the bench, sits and puts all of her belongings in her bag. Then she puts her hat on.

They'll think I'm cra-zy (When the high drone is almost completely faded.)

(There can be optional short pause while wait-ing for the hammers.)
Cantabile, gentile

And far from this corner on the street

To morrow night the lights will rise, floating by themselves in love or der.

She takes her bag, stands and walks to center stage. Complete crossfade of light.

She raises her hands to chest level and sings to the public:

She looks upward:

She turns full profile to her left and raises her arms to the same position with which the performance began.

She remains motionless as the light fades to black.

Clock

Bell-flute

You and I.

You and I.

You and I.

Bell-flute

Clock

High drum

Talhauzen, 1997