THE CREATIVE IDENTITY OF WOMEN: AN ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST THEMES IN SELECT CHAMBER MUSIC THEATER WORKS BY COMPOSER WILLIAM OSBORNE FOR TROMBONIST ABBIE CONANT

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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D.M.A. THESIS

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To Chris

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a female trombonist, I have an interest in women's roles in music. I had heard of Abbie Conant's experience in the Munich Philharmonic, but it was not until I read her full story in Osborne's article "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case history of Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic" that I truly knew what had happened to her. After exploring the vast resources on Osborne and Conant's website, I came across their chamber music theater productions. I watched a video recording of Conant's performance of *Miriam: The Chair,* and I was completely floored. I had tears in my eyes, and at the time, I was not even sure why. I felt a connection to Miriam and felt her pain and hope as if it were my own. There was an intense passion behind Conant's every gesture and fierceness and beauty in her voice and trombone playing—she was in every sense the embodiment of a true artist. I thought to myself, "This is important. I must perform this one day."

I contacted Conant to thank her for sharing her work and let her know that I was interested in studying her collaborative works with Osborne. That initial correspondence evolved into a fast friendship. After meeting Abbie at the International Women's Brass Conference in Kalamazoo, Michigan in June 2012, she and Bill graciously invited me to visit them in their summer home in Taos, New Mexico. During my visit to Taos, I recorded six hours of interviews and saw the studio where Abbie and Bill practice and perform their chamber music theater works. It was truly an invaluable experience to spend time with Abbie and Bill and to learn about their artistry. I want to thank Abbie and Bill from the bottom of my heart for their involvement and support of

my research. They are a constant inspiration to me, and I cannot wait to work with them again as I begin to work on their chamber music theater works myself.

I would also like to thank my trombone professor, Dr. David Gier. He is the perfect example of the teacher and mentor that I want to be for my students one day. None of this would have been possible without his encouragement and guidance. I also want to thank my loving and supportive family—they always knew that I could do this, and I love them so much.

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INTRODUCTION

William Osborne is an American composer, musicologist, and activist who has lived and worked in Germany with his wife and professional trombonist Abbie Conant since 1979. Osborne and Conant have the desire to create musical theater works that fully integrate text, music, and theater, and so, in 1984, they created The Wasteland Company. The first productions of The Wasteland Company were Osborne's musical adaptations of Samuel Beckett's plays. After adapting Beckett's *Happy Days* into a mono-dramatic work entitled *Winnie* for Conant to perform as both a soprano and a trombonist, Osborne felt the desire to author an original chamber music theater work.

In addition to her collaboration with Osborne in The Wasteland Company, Conant was also an active orchestral musician. In 1980, she won a blind audition for the solo trombone position in the Munich Philharmonic. For the next thirteen years, Conant dealt with sexist discrimination in the orchestra. As an artistic response to the pain Osborne and his wife endured, Osborne decided to compose an original chamber music theater work for Conant that dealt with her experience in the Munich Philharmonic—*Miriam.* As self-proclaimed feminists, all of Osborne and Conant's artistic works focus on the creative identity of women.

Osborne's chamber music theater works are musical monodramas that feature a performance artist accompanied by piano or computer-generated, quadrophonic tape. The performance artist must sing, act, and play trombone. Osborne's compositions champion minimal sets, clear, poetic texts, and realistic character development. These aesthetics were developed in part as a reaction to the spectacle of opera and were also inspired by

the minimalistic and existential work of Samuel Beckett. Beginning with *Miriam*, Osborne's chamber music theater works express feminist themes.

This paper is a study of three of William Osborne's chamber music theater works for trombonist Abbie Conant: *Winnie, Miriam: The Chair,* and *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano.* In order to understand Osborne's formal structure and compositional devices, the author will examine *Winnie*, since this work serves as a model for Osborne's later works. *Miriam: The Chair* and *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano* will be studied in a similar way, and the author will also reveal how Osborne and Conant musically express the feminist themes that permeate each work.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION[1]

Abbie Conant

Abbie Conant (b. 1955) is a New Mexico native living and working in Germany as a trombonist, performance artist, and teacher. She is known internationally for her provocative trombone and music theater performances, professional recordings, as well as her advocacy work for women in music after facing discrimination while playing in the Munich Philharmonic. Conant is currently the trombone professor at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Trossingen, Germany.

Conant received her initial trombone and music education from the Interlochen Arts Academy (Interlochen, Michigan), where she was awarded a scholarship and later received a diploma in 1973. She went on to receive her Bachelor's degree in 1977 from Temple University (Philadelphia, PA), where she studied with Dee Stewart. In 1976 Conant studied at Yale University (New Haven, Connecticut) with John Swallow. Conant received her Master's at the Juilliard School (New York, New York) in 1979, studying with Per Brevig.

Conant moved to Europe in 1979 and studied with Vinko Globokar at the L'Accademia di Chigiana (Siena, Italy). By this time, Conant began her professional performing career; additionally, she also received a diploma from the Meisterklasse of Branimir Slokar at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik Köln in 1984. Having studied with some of the most well-respected and talented trombone pedagogues in the music profession, Conant was able to successfully compete as a trombonist in Europe and make

[1] The following background information was derived from William Osborne and Abbie Conant's website as well as the interviews[1] conducted by the author.

a living as a performing musician. From 1979-80 Conant held the position of solo trombone at the Royal Opera of Turin (Italy). On June 19, 1980, Conant was accepted to audition for the solo trombone position in the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra. After winning the blind audition, Conant endured over a decade's worth of sexist discrimination as the only woman in the brass section. Conant's husband, William Osborne, has documented her experience with the Munich Philharmonic in his article "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case History of Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic."[2] Knowledge of Conant's experience in Munich is essential for understanding the artistic origins of Osborne and Conant's artistic endeavors. The author will summarize her experience in the next section.

Abbie Conant and the Munich Philharmonic

Conant's audition invitation for the solo trombone position of the Munich Philharmonic was addressed to *Herr* Abbie Conant, so the orchestra personnel was clearly expecting that Conant was a man. After winning the blind audition, she moved on to both the second and final rounds, beating her male opponents. The orchestra voted to hire her, despite their initial shock that a woman could surpass all of the men. General Music Director Sergiu Celibidache was greatly opposed to the orchestra board's decision. The next thirteen years of Conant's life would be spent fighting and enduring sexist discrimination in the Munich Philharmonic that was initiated and drawn out by Celibidache.

[2] William Osborne, "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case History of Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic," Pub. 1994, http://www.osborne-conant.org/ladies.htm (accessed February 2013). The following section will summarize Osborne's article.

After passing her probation year in the Munich Philharmonic without receiving a verbal complaint during rehearsals from Celibidache, Conant was notified that her trial year had actually been vetoed and that she would be demoted to the second trombone position. Surprised by this sudden and unfounded demotion, Conant contacted the *Deutsche Orchester Vereinigung*[3] in order to take legal action against the city of Munich. Conant was even willing to compromise with Celibidache, and she offered to play second trombone for Celibidache and solo trombone for guest conductors. Celibidache responded to her efforts at compromise with, "You know the problem—we need a man for the solo trombone."

A court hearing for August 17, 1982 was rescheduled because the Munich Philharmonic had not provided any written complaints against Conant. For the new hearing on February 3, 1983, the Munich Philharmonic provided the following criticism:

> The plaintiff does not possess the necessary physical strength to be a leader of the trombone section; she is not in the position to clearly lead the trombone group. Apart from that, she lacks the required empathy to translate the artistic wishes of the General Music Director.[4]

In order to "prove her physical strength," Conant was required to undergo medical tests at the Gautinger Lung Clinic. Conant underwent tests to evaluate her lung capacity, her body's ability to absorb oxygen, and the speed at which she could inhale and exhale. She also underwent physical examinations evaluating her rib cage and chest. By 1985 the court ruled that Conant should be evaluated by a musical "specialist." She was to be

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[3] Translated as "German Orchestra Association."

[4] William Osborne, "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case History of Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic," Pub. 1994, http://www.osborne-conant.org/ladies.htm (accessed February 2013). Brief, Conant vs. LH München, AGM Aktz: 2 Ca 7022/82, Febuary 3, 1983. Original German text: *Die Klagerin verfügt nicht über die physische erforderliche Kraft als Stimmführerin der Posaunen; sie ist nicht in der Lage, die Posaunengruppe eindeutig zu führen. Im übrigen fehlt der Klagerin das erforderliche Einfühlungsvermögen um die künstlerischen Vorstellungen des Generalmusikdirektors umzusetzen.*

tested on all aspects of her trombone playing, especially focusing on her ability to demonstrate endurance, intensity, and loudness. Conant would also be evaluated during a Munich Philharmonic concert performance in addition to performing some of the most challenging excerpts in the orchestral literature for a committee. If the task of preparing for such an evaluation was not daunting enough, the "specialists" that were hired kept canceling and postponing Conant's evaluation. It was not until 1988—three years after the initial date—that Conant was evaluated by Heinz Fadle, who was the president of the International Trombone Association at the time. Much to the Munich Philharmonic's dismay, Fadle provided an excellent review of Conant's performance:

> She [Conant] is a wind player with an outstandingly well-trained embouchure, i.e. lip musculature, that enables her to produce controlled tone production…Her breathing technique is very good and makes her playing, even in the most difficult passages, superior and easy…In this audition she showed sufficient physical strength, endurance, and breath volume, and above and beyond that, she has enormously solid nerves.[5]

Finally, on July 1, 1988, the court ruled in Conant's favor and reinstated her solo trombonist position; however, she continued to be harassed and discriminated against during the remainder of her professional experience with the orchestra.

Conant later learned that she was not being paid at the same rate as her fifteen male colleagues; in fact, she was in a completely different pay scale level than all other brass and wind solo chairs. Celibidache constantly found loopholes in her contract and

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[5] William Osborne, "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case History of Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic," Pub. 1994, http://www.osborne-conant.org/ladies.htm (accessed February 2013). Report of Prof. Fadle February 27, 1988 for LH München vs. Conant, LAG Aktz: 5 Sa 639/84. Original German text: *Sie ist eine Bläserin mit hervorragend ausgebildetem Ansatz - d.h. Lippenmuskulatur, die kontrollierte Tonproduktion in Verbindung mit kontrolliertem Atemfluß ermöglicht, welche ihr optimale Ausnützung ihres Atemvolumens erlaubt. Ihre Atemtechnik ist sehr gut und macht ihr Spiel auch bei schwierigsten Passagen uberlegen und leicht. Physische Kraft, Ausdauer und Atemvolumen hat sie bei diesem Vorspiel hinreichend beweisen können - darüber hinaus eine enorme Nervenkraft. Diese, gepaart mit ihren obengenannten bläserischen Eigenschaften, setzen sie durchaus in die Lage, in einem Spitzenorchester als Solobläserin schwierigste Phrasen nach 'Anweisung des Dirigenten ausreichend lange und mit der gewünschten Intentsität sowie Starke durchzuhalten.*

forced her to play second or assistant principal. Osborne attests that this harassment was aggressive and undoubtedly intended to persuade Conant to leave the orchestra. After continuous court battles, failed compromises, and unrelenting discrimination, on March 10, 1993 the court finally ruled in favor of Conant. The court ruled that Conant be placed in the same pay scale bracket as her male counterparts and awarded back pay from September 1, 1988. By that time, Conant had already decided to leave the orchestra after being awarded a full professorship at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Trossingen, Germany, where she continues to teach to this day.

William Osborne

William Osborne (b. 1951) is a composer, musicologist, and activist from Deming, New Mexico. He is internationally recognized for his chamber music theater compositions that he composed and continues to compose for his wife, trombonist Abbie Conant, as well as his Beckett productions, which are music theater works set to the texts of Samuel Beckett's plays. Osborne's scholarly activism denouncing patriarchy and promoting feminist ideals in music has been the catalyst for real change and action against discrimination in professional orchestras.

As a student of composition, Osborne studied with George Crumb for five years in Philadelphia and New York and with Franco Donatoni for two years in Rome and Siena. He has been awarded two ASCAP awards, a Doctoral Fellowship to Columbia University, was an alternate to the American Rome Prize, and received a major prize from the Theater Commission of the City of Munich for his Beckett productions. Osborne has written many scholarly articles on the subjects of women in music, music sociology, and musicology. His article "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case History of

Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic," won a "Best of the Web" award, inspired a German documentary as well as the last chapter of Malcom Gladwell's bestselling book *Blink*.[6] Osborne's article entitled "Art is Just an Excuse: Gender Bias in Major Orchestras,"[7] detailing the Vienna Philharmonic's refusal to hire women, fueled international protests against the Vienna Philharmonic and gained attention from the media. [8] Osborne continues to be an activist for women in music by contributing to scholarly discussions and continually creating new feminist works.

The Wasteland Company and "Chamber Music Theater"

Both Conant and Osborne fought tirelessly against the discrimination by the Munich Philharmonic. Fortunately, the experience they endured ultimately led to artistic development. In 1984 Conant and Osborne founded a music theater company they named The Wasteland Company. Osborne describes the "wasteland" they refer to by quoting Joseph Campbell, American mythologist and writer: "And what is the nature of the wasteland? It is a land where everybody is living an inauthentic life, doing as other people do, doing as you're told, with no courage for your own life. That is the wasteland."[9] As self-proclaimed feminists, Osborne and Conant have made it a goal that The Wasteland Company's productions especially focus on the creative identity of women in an effort to address the conditions of "the wasteland," and ultimately, to

[6] Malcom Gladwell, *Blink: the Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007).

[7] William Osborne, http://www.osborne-conant.org/excuse.htm (accessed February 2013).

[8] Jan Herman, "Taking on the Vienna Philharmonic: Composer-Activist Plays the Internet for Women's Rights," MSNBC, January 20, 2000, http://www.osborne-conant.org/Taking-on.htm (accessed February 2013).

[9] William Osborne, http://www.osborne-conant.org/theater.htm (accessed February 2013).

transcend it. The Wasteland Company has produced eleven productions, all composed by Osborne, and eight of the productions were composed for Conant specifically. These productions were written for a performance artist—Conant sings, acts, and plays trombone—and quadraphonic tape or live piano accompaniment.

Osborne had aspirations to become an opera composer early in his career, and The Wasteland Company's productions certainly fit into the music theater genre; however, the fundamental ideals of The Wasteland Company could not be more different than those of opera. Osborne and Conant's goal was to create a new genre of music theater apart from opera that they call "chamber music theater." The specific operatic ideals that Osborne and Conant reject include: the *bel canto*[10] singing style, due to the fact that the libretti often becomes incoherent; the spectacle of over-the-top scenery and productions, due to the distraction and impracticalities they bring; the common disconnect between the libretti and the music, which often muddles the theme or philosophical meaning of the work; and the use of stock characters, which are often only present as a means of tradition and formula.

By contrast, Osborne and Conant continually strive to uphold new ideals in their chamber music theater productions such as the full integration of music, theater, and text; coherent and rhythmic texts; bare-bone sets that are geared for touring; and the exploration of the worlds of single characters. The compositional and artistic influences for The Wasteland Company have deep philosophical underpinnings dating back to the Florentine Camerata,[11] Aristotle, Descartes, and Dante. Conant describes some of her

[10] Italian operatic term meaning "beautiful singing."

[11] A group of humanists, intellectuals, musicians and poets who assembled during the late Renaissance (1573-1582) and are credited for forming the first concepts of opera.

problems concerning operatic music and text in her August 2012 interview with the author:

> If you go to an opera, the music can just be so present. It's almost "extroverted," and that is a problem with opera. In opera, the words are almost aside the point—just something to say…It's a form for the singer. The philosophy is so different looking back to the Florentine Camerata. But that's what they were trying to do—it was just a noble attempt…but they're [early operas] lacking something.[12]

Contemporary influences for The Wasteland Company include Parisian playwrights such as Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Jean Genet (1910-1986), Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). Martin Esslin's study of post-World War II drama categorizes these French dramatists as writing in a style known as the Theatre of the Absurd. Esslin traces these Absurdists' intellectual roots to Camus's writings during the Nazi occupation—the most notable being *The Myth of Sisyphus*[13] (1942), writing, "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity"[14]

Influences of Samuel Beckett

While these influences play an important role in the development and evolution of The Wasteland Company's productions, perhaps the most crucial influence stems from the works and theoretical concepts of Samuel Beckett. It was happenstance that Osborne

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[12] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

[13] Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (France: Gallimard, 1942), English translation, *The Myth of* Sisyphus (United Kingdom: 1955). Camus' fourth chapter outlines the myth of Sisyphus in which Sisyphus defies the gods and is punished with the eternal task of pushing a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down again. Sisyphus embodies an absurdist hero that lives life to the fullest, hates death, and is condemned to eternally perform a meaningless task.

[14] C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove/Atlantic Inc., 2004) 49.

began reading the works of Samuel Beckett after purchasing *Waiting for Godot* while living in Munich, Germany. Osborne describes what first drew him to Beckett:

> I didn't know anything about Beckett. But I was just looking at the language and noticing how musical it was. It had this kind of poetic rhythm, so I bought the play. This bass clarinetist had asked me to write a piece for her…I was going to write a piece for dancing bass clarinetist—Stockhausen did that, so the idea was in the air… I realized that I could take this text [from Beckett] and write a music theater piece—for a singing, talking, acting, and dancing bass clarinetist… It wasn't a structural element or even a philosophical element that [first] drew me to Beckett. It was just the musicality of his language.[15]

As Osborne became more familiar with the works of Beckett, he began to compose more works that were based on Beckett's plays, which he refers to as his Beckett productions. Osborne composed *Hamm* (1982), which was based on Beckett's *Endgame*. He described how he came about composing *Hamm*:

> I wrote this piece [*Hamm*] for acting violinist based on *Endgame*. I still didn't really have the idea that I would turn Abbie into a performance artist, personally. I was really just exploring on my own. By chance I found a violinist who was just an incredible actor and extremely extroverted, and he just killed people with that piece. It was just seventeen minutes—a short work, and by some miracle, I got a fairly good recording of it.[16]

Osborne's other Beckett productions include: *Words and Music* (1983), *Winnie* (based on *Happy Days*, 1984), *Ohio Impromptu* (1986), *Act Without Words I* (1986), and *Rockaby* (1986). Conant performed *Winnie, Act Without Words I,* and *Rockaby* since Osborne adapted these works for a performance artist and trombonist. After composing these six pieces based on Beckett's texts, Osborne decided to send Beckett his scores and recordings. After a few weeks, Osborne received a card in the mail from Beckett. Osborne describes Beckett's response:

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[15] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

[16] Ibid.

> He said that he was impressed with my work and its execution…but he didn't like how *Hamm* was being shouted and done so forcefully…He was impressed with the form and said that if I was ever in Paris that he would like to meet me. So, naturally, I found a reason to go to Paris.[17]

Formal and Compositional Structure

After setting Beckett's plays to music, Osborne discovered a structure and form that seemed to apply to many of Beckett's works. It was not until Osborne and Conant collaborated on the production of *Winnie* that they became truly aware of this specific three-part form. All of Osborne's original productions that follow his Beckett productions are based on this varying form, which will be referred to as "A.E.R. structure." The basic A.E.R. structure is as follows: Anticipation→Event→Reflection. Each large section is further broken down into smaller theatrical beats[18] and musical events that meld acting, singing, and trombone playing.

Osborne typically establishes the "Anticipation" section with the first sentence of the work, which states the theme that will be explored. The "Mad Soprano" in Osborne's *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano*, for example, opens with the lines, "Tomorrow is my audition. What will I sing for them?" This theme is developed and followed by a short "B" section that has a more lyrical nature. The "A" theme of the "Anticipation" section then returns and reaches a climax, often ending with a sort of theatrical punch line. The second major section, the "Event," is usually divided into three subsections that he refers to as: Prattle, Interlude, and the Trombone & Voice section. With regard to the Event section, Osborne recalls:

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[17] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

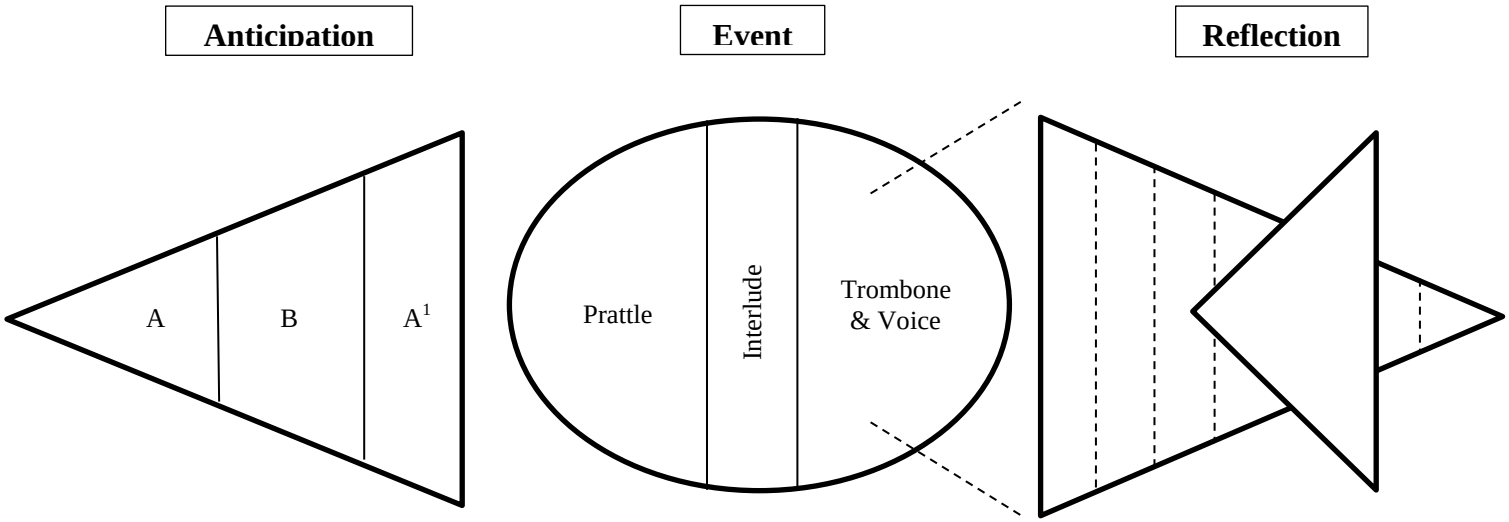
[18] A common theater term used to describe a small dramatic action or event.

> And then a motif usually appears in the music to indicate that she [the character] will start something new…the character just prattles on, and we call it the Prattle Section…And then there's usually a more reflective interlude as the prattling settles down. Then she picks up her trombone…So it's the Prattle, sometimes a reflective interlude, and then the Trombone & Voice section, which is the big frenetic climax in the middle of the piece.[19]

The third major section, the "Reflection," consists of about nine subsections or theatrical beats—short dramatic events. Each beat has a different theme or action, and once the character reaches approximately two-thirds of the way through the Reflection, one or more beats escalate to a point of cathartic explosion. Osborne's chamber music theater works then follow an arc form, typically fading away to nothing. This brief description of Osborne's A.E.R. structure is applied to *Winnie* as well as all later chamber music theater works. See Figure 1 on the following page to see how Osborne formally organizes his chamber music theater works.

[19] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

Figure 1: Diagram of A.E.R. Structure



Compositional Details

A characteristic of Osborne's works is a musical rendering of Beckett's characteristic use of silence and space. In fact, it was Beckett's profound use of silence that initially compelled Osborne to set his plays to music. Osborne recalls in his interview with the author:

> Another thing that made his [Beckett's] text so musical was that he wrote a lot of silences. He would just write "long pause" or "short pause" as stage directions in his text. He [Beckett] once said that silence flows in his plays like water into a sinking ship. And basically what I discovered is that water can be music—that music could flow in between the words—into all of the silences created by his words.[20]

Osborne often fills Beckett's "pauses" with motivic accompaniment material in the piano, but he also adheres to Beckett's "pauses" by writing musical rests in the vocal part, even as small as eighth or quarter rests, to represent a brief pause in textual delivery.

Just as silence can be notated and even prescribed, so can other theatrical components such as gesture and diction. The use of stage directions can help an actor or actress execute specific behaviors that add a sense of realism. For example, Beckett uses over one hundred stage directions in the first few pages of *Happy Days* as the main character, Winnie, performs her morning rituals. These notated actions truly add a sense of individualism to the character. In his scores, Osborne makes use of many stage directions that accompany the music and text. While Beckett's original works did not contain music, he did desire that the text be spoken in a very specific manner, which Osborne learned during his personal meetings with Beckett. By utilizing rhythmic

[20] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

notation, Osborne is able to notate the exact rhythms of the spoken and sung texts in his works. Each element of singing, speaking, trombone playing, gesture, and acting is closely related in Osborne's compositions. Osborne describes this relationship by stating:

> Words, singing, speaking, gesture, and acting are strongly integrated and coordinated with a patina of music. This is possible because each of these elements is precisely notated in the score, which functions as a production book, and which aligns all of these elements with the music.[21]

Opposing the elaboration of large-scale operatic sets, Osborne and Conant uphold Beckett's simple Aristotelian ideal of using a single time, place, and image for each work. Osborne believes that this simplistic approach delivers "an especially powerful, iconic effect because it removes all that is extraneous and thus reveals fundamental aspects of our [humanity's] existential condition."[22] The iconic clarity of simple sets and images allow Osborne and Conant to explore the inner life of a single character through the expressive medium of mono-dramatic music theater.

Description of Project

Osborne's first Beckett productions and his entirely original chamber music theater works for The Wasteland Company emerged during the time when his wife and musical collaborator was battling gender discrimination in the Munich Philharmonic. It was this systematic and pervasive discrimination that inspired Osborne and Conant's artistic and musical response. After realizing structural and theatrical ideals present in *Winnie*, Osborne set out to compose completely original works that addressed the misogyny that Conant experienced.

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[21] William Osborne, "*Miriam* and Our Theories on Chamber Music Theater," April 26, 2011, http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#essay (accessed February 2013).

[22] Ibid.

The primary goal of this paper is to explore the concept of the creative identity of women, as presented in select productions by The Wasteland Company. This goal will be achieved by employing an analysis of the formal structure and the feminist themes that are present in select chamber music theater works by William Osborne for trombonist Abbie Conant. The analysis will be directed towards the development of Osborne's compositional style and his collaboration with Conant. A secondary goal of this paper is to promote the burgeoning genre of chamber music theater that has come to include the trombone. By offering an understanding and appreciation for this music, it is the hope of the author to inspire future performances.

Limitations

The focus of this study will be the mono-dramatic works composed by William Osborne for trombonist Abbie Conant that feature feminist themes and are formally based on the Beckett-inspired A.E.R. structure within the chamber music theater genre. These works include *Winnie, Miriam: The Chair,* and *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano.* Osborne's *Winnie*, based on the play *Happy Days*[23] by Samuel Beckett and not feminist in nature, will be studied for the purpose of revealing the formal A.E.R. structure and compositional devices of Osborne. The author will focus her study on the second part of the trilogy, *Miriam*: *The Chair,* since it has emerged as a stand-alone work and is often performed as such by Conant. The necessary context for the remaining portions of *Miriam* will be provided in the description of the larger work. There are two additional pieces in Osborne's oeuvre that could be considered for this project, but the author has excluded them for specific reasons. *Cybeline* (2004) falls into the multimedia music

[23] Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

theater genre, as does *Music for the End of Time* (1998). Also, *Cybeline* has recently been studied by Spanish scholar Jesús Fernando Lloret González.[24] In turn, Osborne's most recent chamber music theater work, *Aletheia* (2011), is currently being revised and has not yet been premiered by Conant. *Aletheia* will be considered by the author for further study as a separate project and also features feminist themes. The author will provide necessary background information, yet the primary goal of this paper is to extract and explore feminist themes present in select chamber music-theater works composed by William Osborne for trombonist Abbie Conant.

Methodology and Procedure

In order to achieve the primary goal of extracting and exploring feminist themes a multi-layered approach is necessary. One important ideal of Osborne and Conant's concept of chamber music theater is the complete integration of text, music, and theater, so balanced dramaturgical, musicological, and theoretical procedures will be used. These analytical approaches will rely heavily on score study. A dramaturgical approach, inspired by Aristotle, considers how the relationship between character, gesture, and speech supports the expression of different feminist themes. A musicological approach examines historical and cultural references in the context of performance practice. A theoretical approach explores how the composer's unique musical language is used to support the feminist themes within each work. This third approach also considers formal structure to identify different ways feminist themes are portrayed and the composer's evolving compositional style. Meaningful understanding will arise from studying the

[24] Jesús Fernando Lloret González, "Fusión del Teatro Y La Ópera a Través de Los Medios Audiovisuales: La Trombonista Abbie Conant Y El Compositor William Osborne" (Ph.D. dissertation in Cinema and Communication department, University of Málaga, 2012).Translates to: *The Fusion of Theater and Opera Through Audiovisual Media in the Work of William Osborne and Abbie Conant.*

relationship and alignment between the compositional elements of text, music, and form. It is at these points of alignment when Osborne's feminist themes are clearly realized.

Primary Sources

Research for this dissertation proceeds from recently edited scores for each chamber music theater work studied. Other scores by Osborne, including many of his Beckett productions, inform his developing compositional style. Osborne's scores also serve as production books for each work. Osborne and Conant have further provided the author with audio and video recordings since these works are seldom performed. These recordings provide a deeper understanding of how the works are to be realized in a performance setting. Six hours of interview with Osborne and Conant in Taos, New Mexico during August of 2012 have been transcribed and are included as an appendix in this document

Other primary sources include the writings that Osborne and Conant have contributed to their website: www.osborne-conant.org. Osborne and Conant update this website regularly with articles and resources such as downloadable scores and video recordings of performances. The articles by Osborne and Conant that are relevant to this project fall into two categories: women in music and writings about music theater. Within the category of women in music, four primary articles of Osborne's will be considered and addressed chronologically. "You Sound Like a Ladies' Orchestra: A Case History of Sexism Against Abbie Conant in the Munich Philharmonic"[25] was published by Osborne on his website 1994. Osborne's "Art is Just an Excuse: Gender Bias in International

[25] William Osborne, http://www.osborne-conant.org/ladies.htm (accessed February 2013).

Orchestras"[26] was published in the *International Alliance of Women in Music Journal* 1996. This article addresses the social phenomenon of patriarchal archetypes in international orchestras, citing cases of sexism in both the United States and Europe. The orchestras that Osborne references hold staunch beliefs that gender and ethnic uniformity yield aesthetic superiority. Osborne produces evidence of patriarchy that feminist musicologists assert is present in Western music and played out in misogynist practices of the orchestral ensemble. Published in *Leonardo Music Journal* 1999, Osborne's "Symphony Orchestras and Artist-Prophets: Cultural Isomorphism and the Allocation of Power in Music"[27] uses the Vienna Philharmonic as a case study to explore his belief that the allocation of power in artistic realms often relates to larger and more overarching beliefs in society itself.

In the context of music theater, Osborne and Conant have published recent articles that revisit the performance of *Miriam: The Chair* from Conant's sabbatical project during the 2010-11 academic year. Osborne's "*Miriam* and Our Theories of Chamber Music Theater"[28] traces their early conception of chamber music theater, the ideals they strove to uphold in production, the performance practice they employed, and the viability of this new genre. In "Diving Back Into the Bitter Waters of *Miriam*,"[29] Conant documents the findings of her sabbatical project. Conant's goal in this project was

[26] William Osborne, http://www.osborne-conant.org/excuse.htm, 1996 (accessed February 2013).

[27] Ibid., "Symphony Orchestras and Artist-Prophets: Cultural Isomorphism and the Allocation of Power in Music," *Leonardo Music Journal* 9 (1999) 69-75.

[28] Ibid., http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#essay, April 2011 (accessed February 2013).

[29] Abbie Conant, http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#diving, June 2011 (accessed February 2013).

to apply the seven principles that were outlined by Michael Gelb's bestselling book *How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci*[30] and apply them to re-learning the very challenging work *Miriam: The Chair.* By re-visiting and performing a work that was written during such a difficult time in her life, Conant gained new insight into the work's feminist themes.

Review of Feminist Musicology

Related literature that will inform this project are the writings of feminist musicologists and scholars. It is significant to note the journey that "feminist musicology" has taken since its early beginnings in the 1970s. Susan McClary has traced this journey in her article "Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s."[31] The author will briefly summarize McClary's writings on the history of feminist musicology.

Early feminist musicology appeared in the 1970s and centered on the research of women in music history, which primarily included archival research and biographies. By the 1980s, specific texts on the history of women in music emerged. In 1982, Carol Neuls-Bates published collections such as *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present,*[32] and in 1986, Jane Bowers and Judith Tick published *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950.*[33]

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[30] Michael Gelb, *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day,* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1998).

[31] Susan McClary, "Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s." *Feminist Studies* 19/2 (Summer 1993): 399-423.

[32] Carol Neuls-Bates, ed. *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

[33] Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

By the 1990s, further questions about the role of women in music were being raised. Is it possible to write music as a woman, or, as a feminist? More importantly, how can a feminist composer articulate a different sense of self in a traditionally patriarchal world? Possible answers point to music criticism and music theory, which is where much of the critique and uneasiness about feminist musicology originates. McClary suggests that there has often been a lack of musical critique, much less feminist musical critique, due to the fact that much of our ways of thinking about music are still influenced by "Romantic idealism."[34] Romantic idealism stems from 19th century wordless and instrumental music, often viewed as "transcendent" of language and social signification. This "transcendence" seems to place "ideal" music outside of cultural critique. A feminist critique was even more frowned upon and discouraged in the field of music academia. As a result, McClary suggests that Western instrumental music was often blindly accepted as an untouchable canon. European feminist musicologists were some of the first to challenge ideas about the Western canon. American musicologist Gisela Ecker's 1986 *Feminist Aesthetics*[35] drew upon German feminist musicologist Eva Rieger's concepts in *Frau, Musik, und Männerherrschaft*.[36] Ecker proposed that musicians have gendered their activities and values. She was one of the first feminist musicologists to analyze gendered-language used to describe the "ideal" sonata form. McClary discussed gendered metaphors that Koch, A.B. Marx, Hanslick, Kreschmar, Schenker, and Schoenberg used

[34] Susan McClary, "Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s." *Feminist Studies* 19/2 (Summer 1993): 407.

[35] Gisela Ecker, *Feminist Aesthetics*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

[36] Eva Rieger, *Frau, Musik, und Männerherrschaft* (Frankfurt, Germany: Ullstein, 1981); excerpted as "'Dolce semplice'? On the Changing Role of Women in Music," in *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Gisela Ecker, trans. Harriet Andersen (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 135-49.

in their writings about music theory in her 1994 article "Paradigm Dissonances: Music Theory, Cultural Studies, Feminist Criticism."[37] These metaphors include concepts of masculine and feminine cadences as well as themes that attribute "feminine" qualities to secondary themes. Catherine Clément's 1979 *Opéra, ou la défaite des femmes*[38] addresses misogyny in operatic masterworks. She systematically proves that operatic heroines are almost always killed or vanquished in order for the plot to ensue. Clément's work, in part, inspired Osborne's chamber music theater work *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano.*

At the 1988 meeting of the American Musicological Society, musicologists interested in feminist critique first discussed the future of feminist musicology. Soon to follow were Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality,*[39] Ruth Solie's *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship,*[40] Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou's *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives in Gender and Music,*[41] Leslie Dunn and Nancy A. Jones' *Embodied Voices: Female Vocality in Western Culture,*[42] and Marcia Citron's *Gender and the Musical Canon.*[43] These writings

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[37] Susan McClary, "Paradigm Dissonances: Music Theory, Cultural Studies, Feminist Criticism," *Perspectives of New Music* 32/1 (Winter, 1994) 79.

[38] Catherine Clément (translated by Betsy Wing), *Opera or the Undoing of Women,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

[39] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[40] Ruth Solie, et al, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[41] Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, et al, *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music, (*Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[42] Leslie Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, et al, *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

emerged as new perspectives in musicology and suggest that music can be a gendered discourse that forms cultural values. The fact that music generates cultural ideology makes the idea of a feminist view of musicology both plausible and necessary.

While the concept of feminist musicology has evolved since the 1970s, the task for this project remains different from studies that have preceded it. Earlier studies have examined the works of female composers outside the musical canon or have applied a feminist critique to works of "master" composers. These critiques involve the inference of gendered values in previous musical and theoretical discourse. By contrast, William Osborne's compositions are explicitly feminist in nature and written in response to discrimination his wife faced as a female musician. This study considers feminism as identity in the generative act and context of music construction.

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[43] Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

CHAPTER TWO

WINNIE (1983)

Setting the Stage

Winnie (1983) was the first chamber music theater work that William Osborne composed specifically for Abbie Conant. It is the third work of his Beckett productions and is based on the text and stage directions from Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days,* that fits distinctly in the realm of the Absurdist Theatre. Osborne draws directly from Beckett's stage directions in *Happy Days* to set the stage for *Winnie,* changing minor elements to suit his adapted work. Osborne's initial stage directions read:

> Expanse of scorched grass rising center to low mound. Gentle slopes down to front and either side of stage. Back an abrupter [*sic*] fall to stage level. Maximum simplicity and symmetry.
>
> Imbedded up to above her waist in exact center of mound, Winnie. About fifty, well preserved, blond for performance, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearly necklace. She is discovered sleeping, her arms on the ground before her, her head on her arms. Beside her on the ground to her left a capacious black bag, shopping variety, and to her right a collapsible collapsed parasol, beak of handle emerging from sheath.
>
> To her right and rear, pianist. The work begins in darkness. [44]

To portray Winnie accurately, Conant wears a large, expansive dress resembling a large mound of dirt and "scorched grass" (Figure 2). When Winnie later sinks to her neck in the ground, her dress is equipped with sleeves that resemble the rest of the dress that she quickly slips on. Retaining the use of her arms in the sleeves, Conant is able to play her trombone while "buried."

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[44] William Osborne, "*Winnie*, a theater work for soprano or instrumental performance artist and piano based on Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*," (München-Pasing, Germany, 1983) 1.

Figure 2: Abbie Conant as Winnie[45]

Osborne describes *Winnie* as "a theater work for soprano or instrumental performance artist and piano,"[46] making the work versatile for the performer does not necessarily have to be an instrumentalist as well. Osborne's score indicates stage directions that allow for the performer to be a soprano or an instrumental artist. In this study, *Winnie* will be evaluated as if an instrumentalist is performing the work—specifically, a trombonist. To date, trombonist Abbie Conant has been the sole performer.

Synopsis of *Happy Days* and *Winnie*

In *Happy Days,* Samuel Beckett searches for the meaning of existence, explores the fragility of human relationships, and questions the relationship humans have with the

[45] Abbie Conant, from http://osborne-conant.org/press-photos/winnie%20arms.jpg (accessed May 2013).

[46] William Osborne, "*Winnie,* a theater work for soprano or instrumental performance artist and piano based on Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*," (München-Pasing, Germany, 1983) 1.

universe by exploring themes of loneliness, timelessness, and death. Winnie bravely faces these issues with an eternally optimistic view of her life. Though Beckett does not explain why Winnie is gradually sinking into the ground, Osborne posits that Beckett is drawing from Dante, and states in his program notes for *Winnie:*

> Dante is a key to Beckett. *Winnie* embodies the forceful image of Canto X in which those who rebel against God are punished. Here are two Epicurians, Farinata and Calvacante, who believe that the highest good is temporal happiness achieved through a virtuous life. They both stand in their graves, Farinata buried to the waist, merrily ignoring the desperate condition of Calvacante, who has only his head remaining above the surface. Winnie's dilemma is similar and we admire her, just as Dante admired the self-sufficiency of Farinata, who maintains his dignity and expresses contempt for all this hell.[47]

It can be inferred that Winnie is a character enduring unrelenting punishment from God. Her existence is one of torture: she is confined to a single space in a harsh climate and is slowly sinking into the earth. Winnie's tiring existence is made even more excruciating by the fact that as she falls asleep, a loud bell sounds and wakes her. The audience never sees her completely buried, so her tortured existence presumably goes on forever, much like Sisyphus' eternal task—a feature of Absurdist Theatre thought. The passing of time becomes increasingly important as she sinks, for each passing second must feel longer than the last as Winnie approaches a burial that may never fully come. Associations with timelessness can be made to Zeno, a Greek philosopher of the 6th century B.C. who told the parable of an "impossible heap of millet," that involves continually dividing the millet in half for eternity. This "impossible heap" can be related to the circumstance in Beckett's plays. Scholar Eva Navratilova suggests the following in her essay "The Absurdity of Samuel Beckett:"

> The remote past of the characters has been filled up quickly, but the nearer time comes to the present, the slower and slower it passes. It shatters into smaller and

[47] William Osborne, http://osborne-conant.org/winnie.htm (accessed March 2013).

> smaller periods, in fact, it is stopping all the time, and the closer it is to the end, to death, the more unattainable it is. Since time is stopping, all the characters are sentenced to never-ending waiting.[48]

This "never ending waiting" is true for the characters in Beckett's *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, and is especially true for Winnie in *Happy Days*, for she continually waits for a death that is unattainable. To make matters more torturous, Winnie keeps herself entertained with her last earthly objects. Unlike herself, her medicine or her lipstick eventually run out, ceasing to exist. These objects taunt her with their finiteness, and as they gradually disappear, her days become more mundane and torturous.

Even though Winnie lives a tortured life, she is blindly optimistic, always proclaiming, "Another heavenly day!" Her husband Willie's presence seems to offer comfort and inspiration, but his depiction is limited to crawling on all fours behind Winnie's mound, grunting one-word responses to her, and looking at pornographic postcards. An incessant talker, Winnie finds comfort in knowing that someone—Willie—at least, hears her as she speaks. Winnie passes her days by talking, singing, and reading again and again the text printed on her few earthly possessions. These possessions are kept nearby in a shopping bag, and include a parasol, a toothbrush, an almost-empty tube of toothpaste, a small mirror, a nearly used up lipstick, medicine, a revolver, a handkerchief, and her spectacles. As Winnie performs her morning ablutions, she reads aloud the ingredients on her medicine bottle, recites half-remembered quotations from classical literature or prayers, and tells stories from her past. As Winnie performs her rituals and keeps herself busy with chatter, she sinks further into the ground.

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[48] Eva Navratilova, "The Absurdity of Samuel Beckett," Center for Comparative Cultural Studies, Palacky Univ., Olomouc, Czech Rep. www.samuel-beckett.net/Absurdity.htm (accessed April 2013).

Osborne's Adaptation of *Happy Days* into *Winnie*

Osborne's adaptation of *Happy Days* into *Winnie* retains Beckett's original themes. His addition of piano accompaniment, sung passages, and the inclusion of trombone performance augment the dramatic portrayal of Beckett's Winnie. Since Osborne developed *Winnie* in the genre of mono-dramatic chamber music theater, he chose to exclude most of Winnie's exchanges with Willie, making Osborne's production significantly shorter than Beckett's *Happy Days.* While Osborne essentially eliminates the need for an actor to portray Willie, this character is still present in Osborne's adaptation as an idea. Even in the original, when Winnie posed questions to Willie, he rarely answered, and if he did, it was usually short, one-word responses or mere grunts. Beckett's manuscript draft for *Happy Days* was scored for "Female Solo."[49] In Osborne's initial concept for *Winnie*, he intended a soprano to portray Winnie and Conant to portray Willie as a trombonist.[50] Osborne took a different artistic direction where Winnie would be both a trombonist and soprano, essentially eliminating the need for someone to play Willie. Osborne's Winnie still talks to Willie, but the portions he adapted do not require Willie's response. Despite modifications, Osborne's *Winnie* honors Beckett's production in the retention of text and stage directions he adapted to form *Winnie.*

Anticipation, Event, Reflection Structure

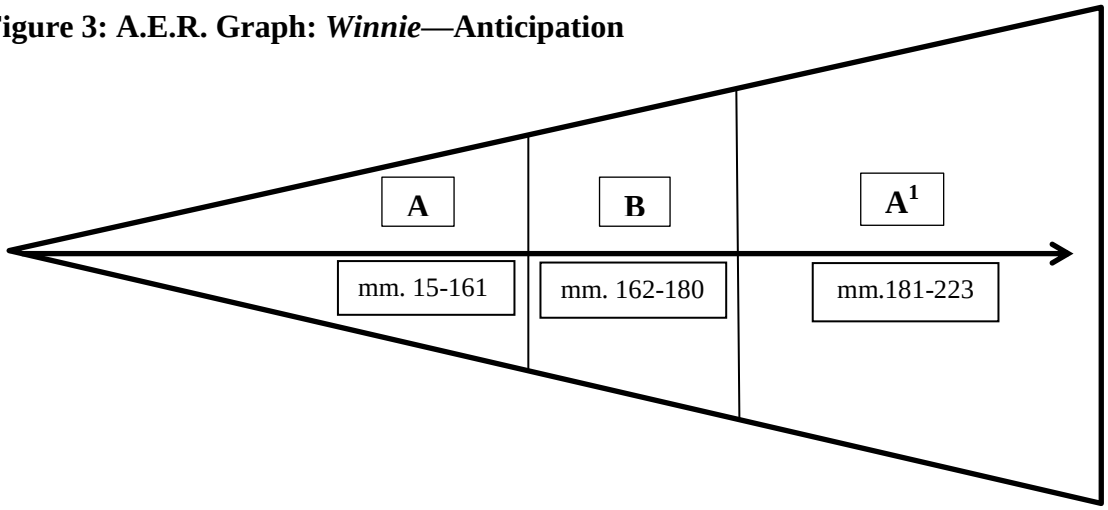
As described earlier in Chapter 1, there is a specific formal structure that informs Osborne's chamber music theater works—the A.E.R. structure. Osborne was not initially

[49] James Knowlson, ed. By Beja Morris *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives,* "Bits of Pipe." (University of Ohio Press, 1983) 20.

[50] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

aware of this structure when he began composing his Beckett productions. It was not until after Osborne and Conant began collaborating on the production of *Winnie* that Osborne realized there was a distinct formal structure within the work. Osborne composed *Winnie* in a way that would later serve as a model for his other chamber music theater works. During the time the author spent with Osborne and Conant, Osborne scribbled structural signposts in the author's score for *Winnie.* From these informal markings, the structure of Osborne's A.E.R. concept will illuminate compositional devices that he uses to demarcate sections of the work. An understanding of formal structure will provide insight into themes within the work as well as offer an understanding of Osborne's later compositions. (Refer back to Figure 1 in Chapter One to see a basic outline of Osborne's A.E.R. structure.) The author will initiate this analysis with a detailed graph of each formal section (Figure 3) followed by a synopsis of each section and a description of compositional devices employed.

Figure 3: A.E.R. Graph: *Winnie*—Anticipation



Synopsis of the Anticipation

Before Winnie appears, the audience hears a haunting melody from the trombone in complete darkness. As the light rises, Winnie's situation is revealed; she is buried waist-deep in a mound of scorched earth. Inimically, Winnie greets the day with bubbling optimism singing (m. 24), "Another heavenly day." Winnie begins each day by saying her prayers. She then rummages through her shopping bag, pulling out items for her morning ablutions. Winnie brushes her teeth, then calls out to her husband Willie, who lives in a hole behind her. Willie rarely answers, but Winnie still talks to him. Though Winnie is not alone, her loneliness is apparent. An incessant talker, Winnie reads the finely printed words on her toothbrush when she receives no response. Winnie is getting older, and her eyesight is worsening; she rummages in her bag for her spectacles. She continues with half-memorized passages from literature as if conversing with the authors themselves: another attempt to ward off loneliness. Winnie alternates between different activities and decides to poke Willie with a parasol. Craning to reach him, she drops the parasol behind the mound. An invisible hand returns the parasol to her, bringing her great joy. Winnie rummages for more objects in her bag. She brings out a revolver, kisses it, and puts it back in the bag. Winnie then brings out a bottle of medicine and reads the label. As she reads, Winnie reflects on what it means to be getting old and "the old style." She drinks the remaining medicine and throws the bottle behind her. As Winnie finishes getting ready, she alternates between reciting quotations and trying to read the fine print on her toothbrush. Eventually, Winnie determines that the fine print on her toothbrush says: "genuine, pure, fully guaranteed hog's setae."[51] This realization is delivered as a

[51] "Hog's setae" refers to the bristles on Winnie's toothbrush. The bristles are made from the hair of a hog.

punch line, and Winnie trails off into a monologue of longing for "the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many hundred degrees and the night of the moon has so many hundred hours" (p. 18).

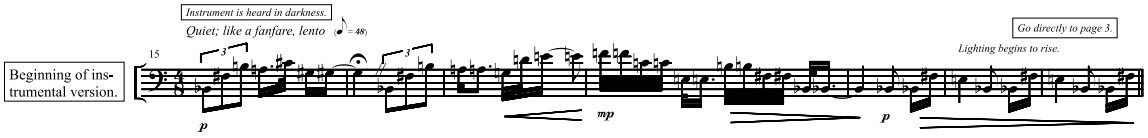
Compositional Devices Utilized in the Anticipation

The first section of Osborne's A.E.R. structure, the Anticipation, is tripartite: A, B, A^1. Osborne differentiates between the sections by employing varying textures in the music. The use of texture as a means of differentiating formal sections works at both a macro and micro formal level. For example, the A sections of the Anticipation uses various textures to illustrate Winnie as she rummages through her shopping bag. The B section is more reflective, with a static texture, as Winnie ponders what it means to get old. A micro level of varying texture occurs when Osborne applies alternating vocal treatments to a single line of Winnie's text. Osborne changes textures with motifs related to character, moods, themes, and gestures; gestural flourishes that are related to specific stage directions; varying use of silence and space; and differing vocal and instrumental treatments that produce multiple "voices."

Musical Motifs

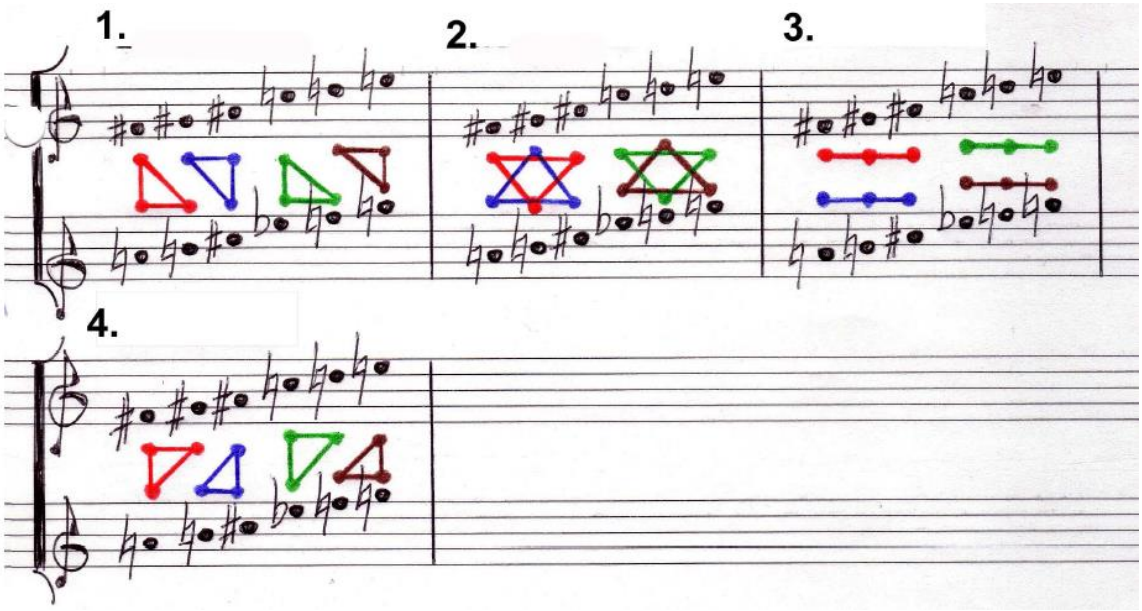
In the Anticipation, Osborne introduces four motifs for use throughout the entire work. The author refers to the first motif as "Winnie's Melody" because it is the trombone line that Winnie plays as the piece begins (Figure 4).

Figure 4: "Winnie's Melody"



"Winnie's Melody" is derived from Osborne's concept of combinatorial hexachords[52] and is composed of three note cells. The first cell begins in measure 15 (B-flat, F#, B), followed by a second cell (A, C#, G#). In Figure 5, "Winnie's Melody" reflects the same notes as the first two triangular cells in number 2 respectively.

Figure 5: Osborne's Cell Theory for Combinatorial Hexachords



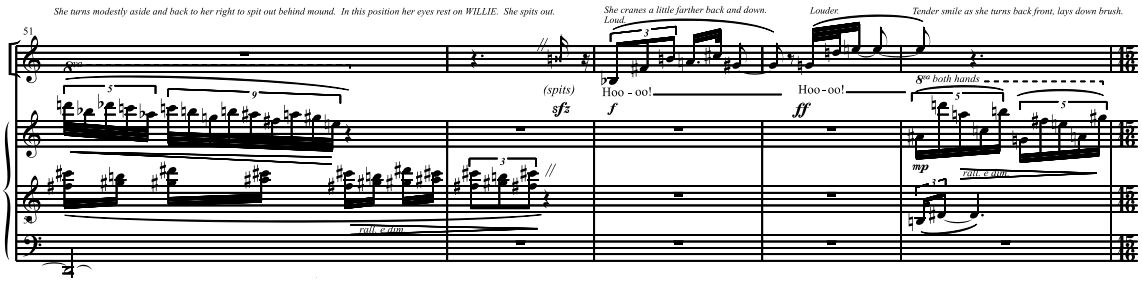
The entire melody can be mapped by combinatorial hexachords with exception of the last note (an E). (According to Osborne's diagram in Appendix 1, the last note of "Winnie's Melody" should technically be an E-flat.) The author discussed this cell abnormality with Osborne, in which he responded, "In the measures you question, the B-flat and F# are the first two notes of the cell, but the E breaks the rule. I used it to create a sense of resolution. I sometimes do that. Very little music, of course, is absolutely bound to the

[52] Refer to Appendix B: Osborne's Theory Regarding His Use of Combinatorial Hexachords.

theories upon which it is based."[53] Though not bound by his own theory, Osborne uses interlocking cells of combinatorial hexachords to represent the inner life, the true voice, of the characters. Osborne describes his method: "I think of these cells/hexachords as 'crystals' because of the way they interlock… For each work, I select a single type of cell to use, which I think of as the DNA of the character."[54]

"Winnie's Melody" appears in both full and fragmented forms. For example, Winnie often sings out to Willie using a fragmented form of "Winnie's Melody" (Figure 6).

Figure 6: "Winnie's Melody" in Fragmented Form

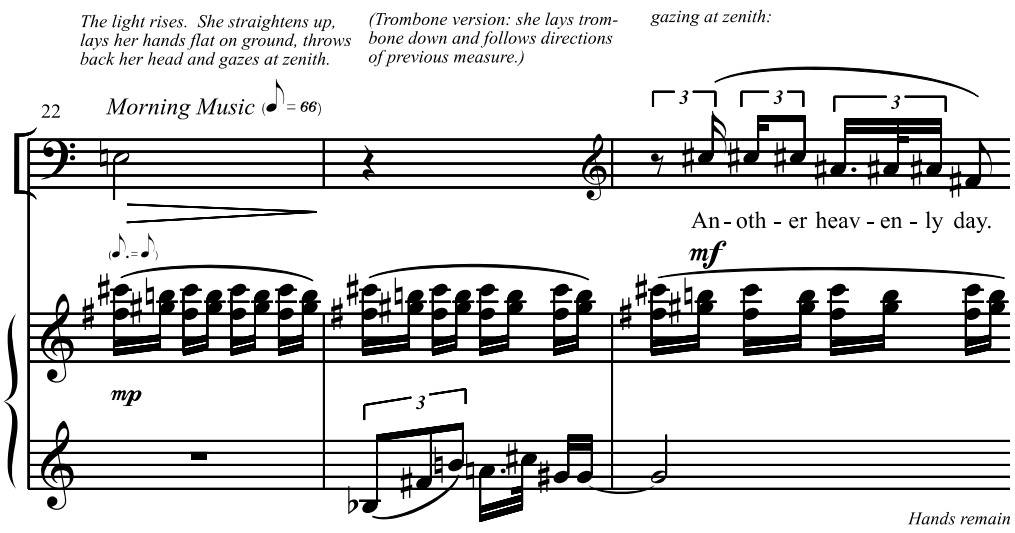


Osborne also uses a fragmented form of "Winnie's Melody" in the piano accompaniment at the beginning of the Anticipation (Figure 7).

[53] William Osborne, email to Jessica Ducharme (10 March 2013).

[54] Osborne, As quoted in an email to Jessica Ducharme. March 28, 2012.

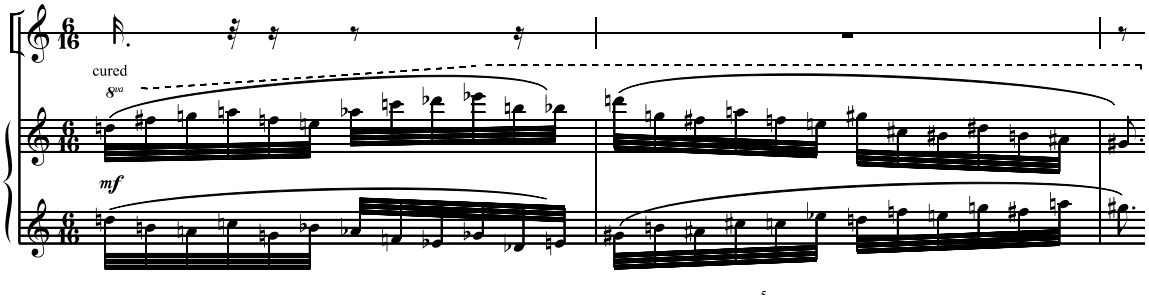
Figure 7: "Winnie's Melody" and "Morning Music"



The next motif that Osborne introduces is "Morning Music," a piano motif that alternates between two-note chords (Figure 7, in the right hand of the piano). Osborne uses "Morning Music" at the beginning of theatrical beats (small theatrical events within the dramatic whole) and as transitional music. The static nature of "Morning Music" reflects Winnie's unchanging situation, and it also creates a calm, serene mood.

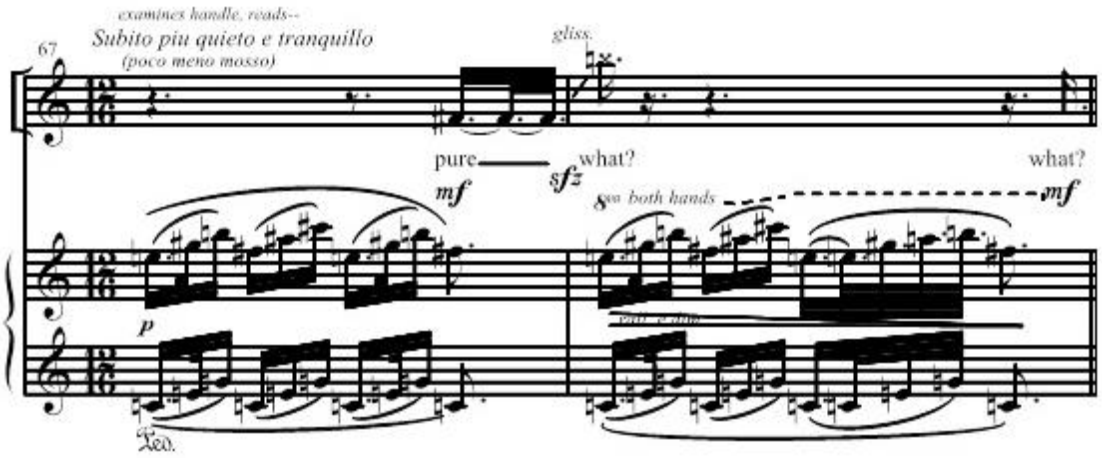
Another motif that Osborne introduces in the Anticipation is a motif that the author identifies as "Rummaging Music." This motif relates to the actions of Winnie and the original stage directions of Beckett (Figure 8).

Figure 8: "Rummaging Music" mm. 59-60



"Rummaging Music" references each time Winnie rummages through her bag. The frantic nature of this busy motif illustrates Winnie's desperation to find something in her bag. An important concept in the Anticipation is the fact that Winnie is always searching for something to say. This searching is manifested in Winnie's constant rummaging for various objects. The final motif that Osborne introduces in the Anticipation is what the author refers to as "Contemplative Music." This motif is similar to "Morning Music:" a calm, transitional music. Osborne also uses it when Winnie examines her various objects. For example, as Winnie examines the fine print on her toothbrush for the first time, the piano plays "Contemplative Music." This motif is only played by the piano (Figure 9).

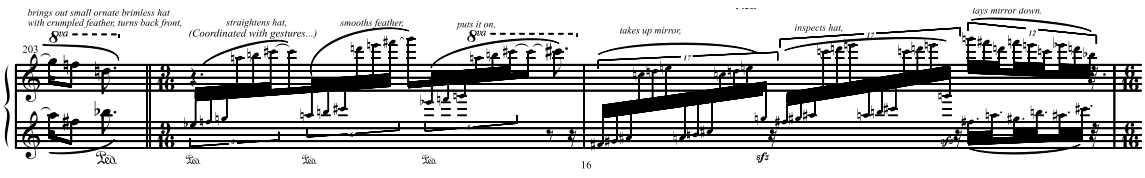
Figure 9: "Contemplative Music"



Gestural Flourishes and Stage Directions

In composing *Winnie*, Osborne remained true to Beckett's original *Happy Days* stage directions. These stage directions indicate precise movements and gestures from the performer, and Osborne has composed similar musical flourishes in the piano part to accompany such gestures. There are many instances of this technique within the Anticipation, but an explicit example occurs when Winnie pulls out a hat from her bag, adjusts the hat on her head, smoothes the feather, and looks at herself in the mirror (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Coordinated Gestures with Piano Flourishes



Varied Uses of Silence and Space

Beckett's original work *Happy Days* made great use of silence. Beckett prescribed moments of silence by calling for varying "pauses." True to Beckett's wishes for *Happy Days*, Osborne transcribed Beckett's pauses into the musical score. Osborne indicates these pauses with rests, *caesuras*, and *fermatas*. Osborne uses different lengths of rest to parallel Beckett's original indications. For example, Osborne might use an eighth or quarter rest for a single "pause," and he might use a full measure of rest or a *fermata* to indicate a "long pause." Another compositional use of silence and space relates to the piano accompaniment. Osborne occasionally fills Beckett's extended pauses with piano motifs. But, Osborne notates silence in the piano accompaniment, and the lack of underscoring can highlight the text that Winnie speaks, creating a monologue.

Varied Vocal Treatments

Winnie is a complex being who confronts terror with optimism and lonelinesds with incessant chatter. Since Willie rarely interacts with Winnie, she must essentially converse with herself. Winnie sometimes answers her own questions and creates imaginary worlds with her memories, stories, or half-remembered quotations from her favorite books. Her different voices serve as subtle secondary characters. James Knowlson comments on Winnie's banter with herself in *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*: "Winnie's quotations come, however in many different forms and occur even in several different voices, as she indulges in a highly sophisticated form of ventriloquism."[55] In order to reflect these various voices that Winnie uses, Osborne has applied different vocal treatments to Winnie's lines of text—another use of varied

[55] James Knowlson, ed. By Beja Morris *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, "Bits of Pipe." (University of Ohio Press, 1983) 20.

texture. The differing vocal treatments that Osborne employs include rhythmically notated text, normal speech, and melodically notated text.

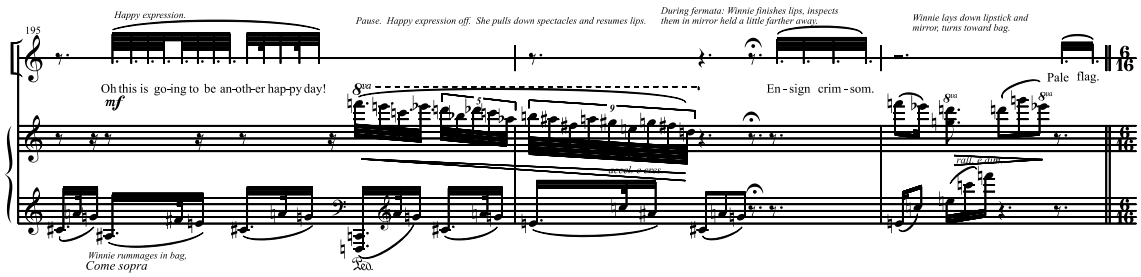
Rhythmically Notated Text

Osborne uses rhythmically notated text without pitches as a means of achieving inflection in the voice and coordination with the piano accompaniment. Osborne describes the purpose behind his rhythmically notated texts:

> In opera, the music is always superior to the text. And so I told him [Beckett] that I was trying to create a music theater where the music didn't win. And that's pretty much true with *Winnie* and my other settings of his works. They all use very thin, simple accompaniments that bring out the musicality of his words. And that's why he was so interested in my work—you know, he would always think so carefully about the rhythms of the words. And when he would direct people, he would insist that they say the words with a certain rhythm, and it was a very tedious process because he couldn't notate the rhythms of those words, and I kind of invented a way of doing that and built these pieces around the rhythmic nature of his words.[56]

An example of rhythmically notated texts occurs when Winnie says, "Oh this is going to be another happy day! Ensign crimson. Pale flag." (Figure 11)

Figure 11: Rhythmically Notated Text



[56] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

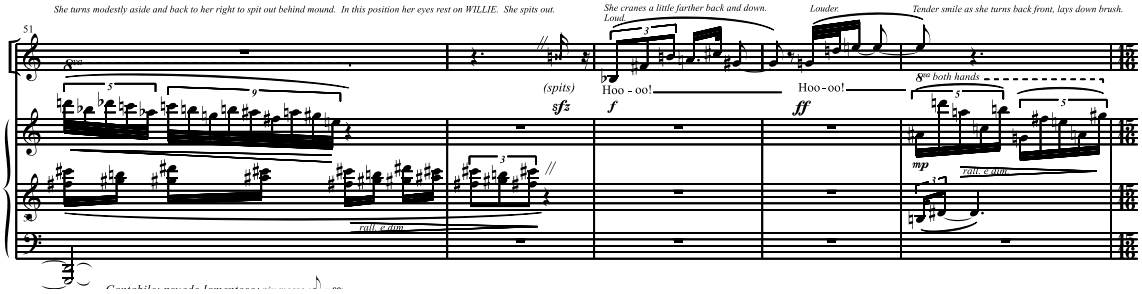
Freely Spoken Text

In certain instances, Osborne abandons the idea of rhythmically notated lines of text and indicates that the passage should be spoken freely. This option relies on the dramatic capabilities of the performer, typical for most theatrical works. Osborne uses this method when the piano is silent when there is no need for rhythmic coordination between performer and accompaniment. Osborne's first use of this vocal treatment occurs after measure 137, when Winnie drops her parasol and someone [Willie] hands it back to her. She happily exclaims, "Thank you dear…Damp." A more extensive use of this technique occurs after the punch line of the Anticipation section and before Winnie's Prattle section (p. 18). In this short monologue, Winnie expresses her longing for "…the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees and the night of the moon has so many hundred hours." Since this short monologue happens at the end of a major section of the work and does not have piano accompaniment, the dramatic effect is that much greater.

Melodically Notated Text

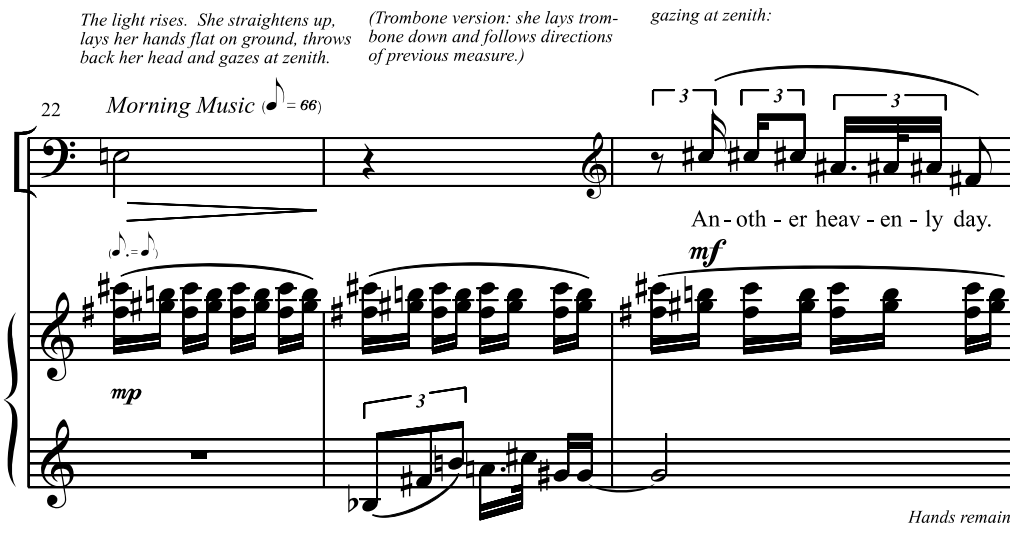
Sung text is the most widely used vocal treatment in the entire work. Osborne varies Winnie's melodically notated text by using motifs, employing melodic text painting, or re-imagining Winnie's melodies in a *coloratura* style. In the Anticipation, all three styles are used. The use of "Winnie's Melody" has been discussed, but occurs again in a fragmented form as Winnie calls out to Willie beginning on a B-flat in measure 53 (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Melodically Notated Text Using Motifs



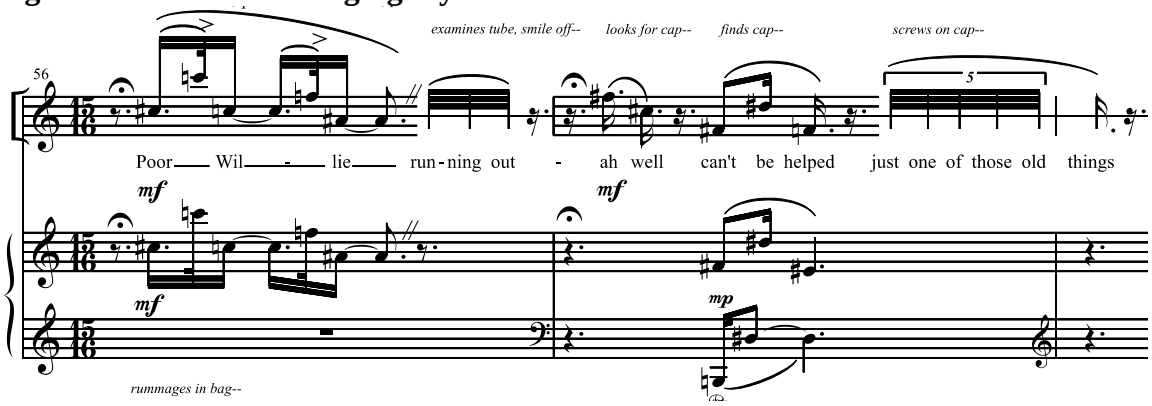
Osborne's use of text painting is illustrated by Winnie's first sung line: "Another heavenly day." The descending melodic contour of this line portrays Winnie's descent into the ground. Her optimism contradicts her situation, and her melodic statement further dramatizes it (Figure 13). There are no other instances of text painting in the Anticipation, but other examples occur in subsequent formal sections.

Figure 13: Melodic Text Painting



Another way that Osborne treats Winnie's sung text is to employ *coloratura*, an operatic singing style that was popular during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is virtuosic by nature and is constructed with wide intervallic leaps in rhythmic syncopation. Osborne uses this singing style sparingly, eschewing it in later works due to the extreme difficulty for singers. Osborne explains his initial inexperience in writing for the female voice, "So we [Osborne and Conant] started working on it [*Winnie*], and it was just *hopeless.* First, I didn't really have a good concept of the human voice. I wrote it in a sort of *coloratura* style. That was before I had taken Alexander Technique lessons. I had really bad posture, and it actually affected my voice."[57] Osborne often reserves the *coloratura* style for phrases that Winnie says often (Figure 14).

Figure 14: *Coloratura* Singing Style



The *coloratura* style is sung in unison with the piano, making it easier for the singer to execute.

[57] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

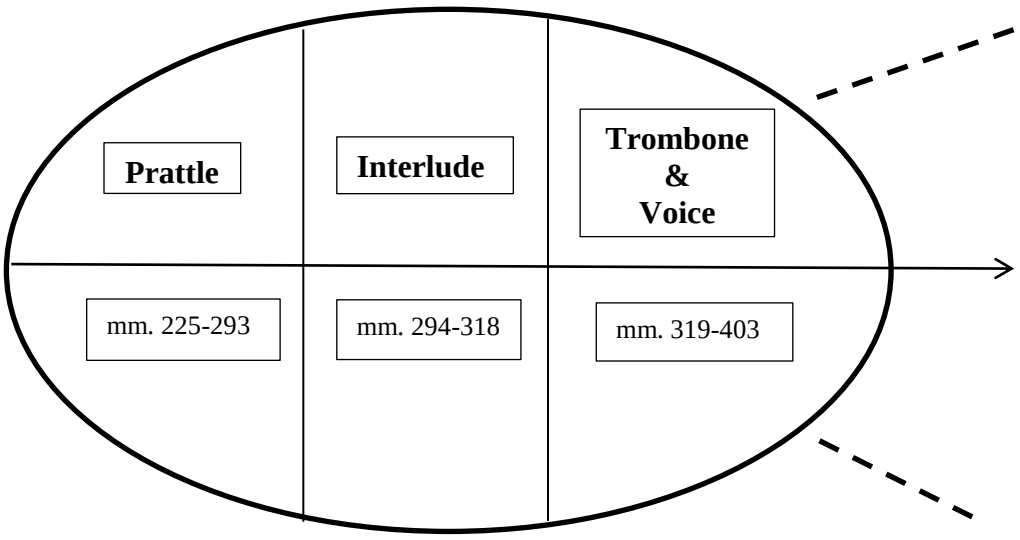
The alternation between the vocal treatments creates Winnie's multiple voices, resulting in a one-way dialogue. For example, in measure 92 Winnie poses the question, "What are those wonderful lines?" She sings her answer in measures 93-94, "Woe, woe is me to see what I see." She then seems to forget the rest of the line, switching back to her *coloratura* style in measures 95-96, "Ah yes, wouldn't miss it." Pondering what she just said, Winnie responds in a rhythmically notated text (m. 97), "Or would I?" Osborne's varying vocal treatment highlights the subtext present in Winnie's words. Winnie wards off loneliness by quoting lines from classic literature, but the lines that she chooses to recite are depressing. Flitting back to a whimsical, *coloratura* style of singing, it is as if Winnie is trying to delude herself into being cheerful, only to question herself again. The depth of Winnie's character is revealed by her different voices. One version of Winnie is blindly optimistic. Another version spouts off quotations only to be saddened by the content of her words. Yet, another version of Winnie openly doubts her situation, realizing its severity.

Summary of the Anticipation

In the Anticipation, Osborne introduces themes that include "Winnie's Melody," "Morning Music," "Rummaging Music," and "Contemplative Music." His compositional techniques will be used throughout the remainder of the work including gestural flourishes that coordinate with stage directions, varying uses of silence and space, and alternating vocal treatments. After Winnie delivers the punch line of the Anticipation and recites a revelatory monologue revealing her true feelings about death and "the happy day," the piano plays a brief interlude and a new section begins. The next major section

of *Winnie* is the Event, which contains three subsections: the Prattle, the Interlude, and the Trombone and Voice sections (Figure 15).

Figure 15: A.E.R. Graph: *Winnie*—Event



Synopsis of the Event: Prattle

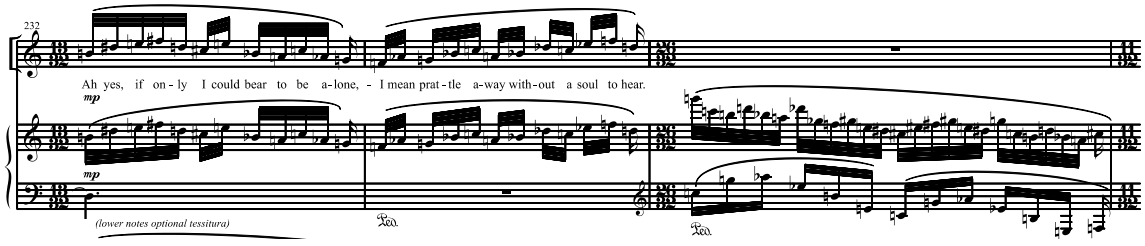
The first subsection of the Event is the Prattle, which is appropriately titled, for Winnie's first line of text (mm. 232-233) is, "Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away without a soul to hear." Winnie's prattling attempts to answer questions raised in the Anticipation. She wants to be heard and to have companionship. Winnie asks Willie (mm. 257-261), "Whereas if you were to die, to speak in the old style, or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what *could* I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep? Simply gaze before me with compressed lips?" Winnie fears dying a little each day more than death itself: death would be a relief compared to the experience of dying. Winnie sarcastically sings, "How

can one better magnify the almighty than by sniggering with him at his jokes, particularly the poorer ones?" Perhaps Winnie's situation is the result of God playing a practical joke. As Winnie prattles on, she gets distracted and trails off trying to remember another literary reference (mm. 289-293); "What is that wonderful line…laughing wild…something, something, laughing wild amidst severest woe…" The quotations Winnie remembers astutely describe her situation.

Compositional Devices Utilized in the Prattle

Osborne's compositional treatment of the Prattle section differs from the Anticipation. This section of does not alternate between different vocal treatments, and no previous motifs are used. The Prattle section features unison lines between the piano and voice with a constant, flowing rhythm in a *legato* style that contrasts the *coloratura* style featured in the Anticipation (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Prattle



During the Prattle section, there are fewer stage directions and much less physical movement since Winnie is not rummaging through her bag. Osborne still coordinates gestures between the piano and the voice. For example, (mm. 267-269) Winnie sings about laughter: "Or a brief—ha, ha, ha—gale of laughter—ha, ha, ha—should I happen to see the old joke again. Ha, ha, ha." Beckett's original text does not include the "ha, ha,

ha's," but Osborne has added them and accompanies the laughing with three short piano flourishes for each "ha."

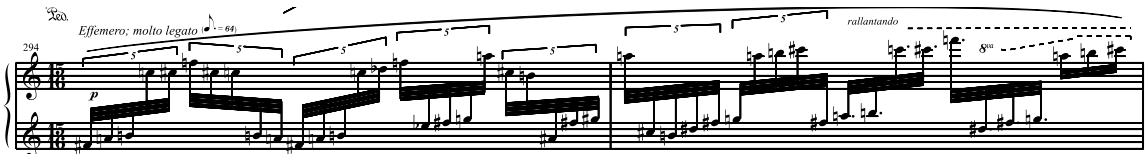
Synopsis of the Event: Interlude

During the short Interlude, Winnie ponders the concept of gravity, expressing that she would float up into the sky if she were not held down by the ground. It is Winnie's unfailing optimism that fuels her floating feelings. She asks Willie if he feels the same way, but he does not respond.

Compositional Devices Utilized in the Interlude

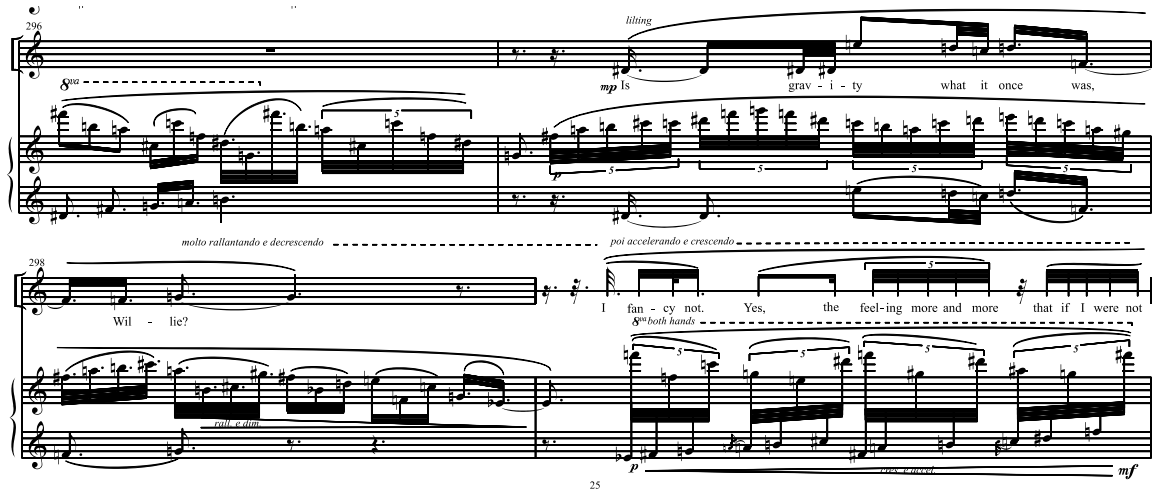
Osborne uses compositional techniques that he has employed earlier, including motifs and varying vocal treatments. Osborne establishes the mood for the Interlude by composing what the author refers to as "Swirling Music" (Figure 17) This motif mirrors Winnie's feelings about floating up into the sky with its steadily rising groups of quintuplets.

Figure 17: "Swirling Music"



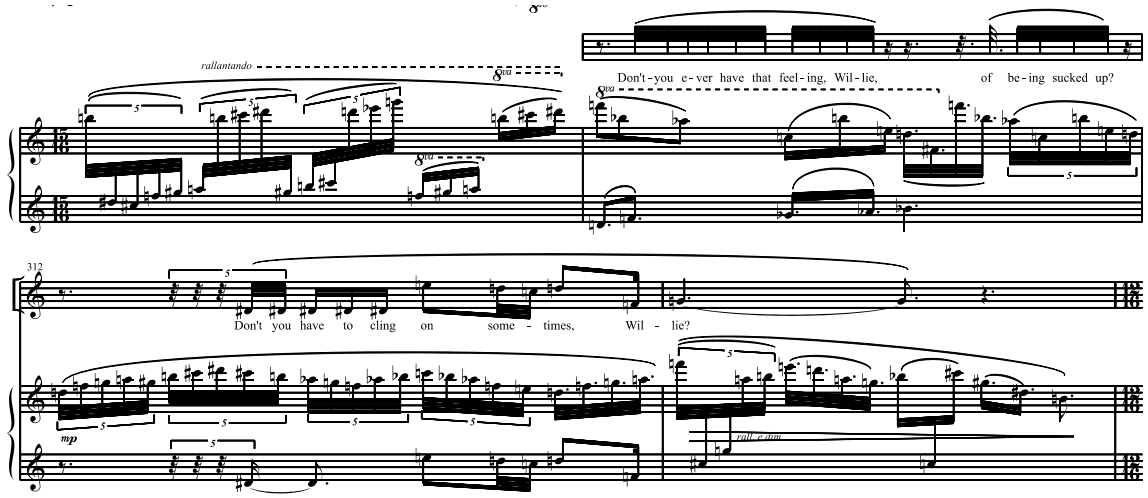
A new motif that Osborne uses is what the author refers to as the "Gravity Motif." This motif is about defying gravity and floating up into the sky (Figure 18). Osborne uses text painting with large upward leaps and subtle descent.

Figure 18: "Gravity Motif"



Osborne continues to create multiple voices for Winnie since Willie ignores her questions. Osborne alternates rhythmically notated texts with sung melodies (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Varied Vocal Treatments

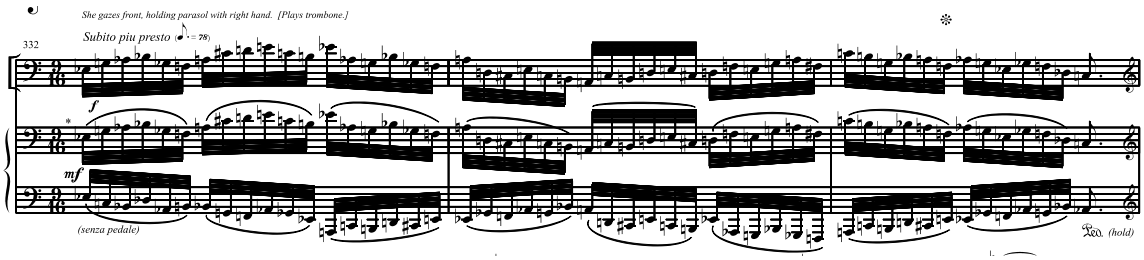


Synopsis of the Event: Trombone and Voice

The Trombone and Voice section begins with Winnie singing in measure 319, "I suppose I might. Yes, I suppose I might…hoist this thing now." The "thing" that Winnie

speaks of is her trombone, which she has not played since the beginning of the work. Winnie states her fear of passing the hours and running out of things to say or do (mm. 327-331), "…the fear so great, certain days, of finding oneself left with hours still to run, before the bell for sleep, and nothing more to say, nothing more to do, that the days go by, certain days go by, quite by, the bell goes, and little or nothing said, little or nothing done. That is the danger to be guarded against." Winnie's fear is apparent. She suddenly plays aggressively on her trombone, as if to express frustration when words fail her. The alternation between text and trombone continues, each time gaining intensity, which the author refers to as "Running Interjection" based on the constant fleeting thirty-second notes (Figure 20).

Figure 20: "Running Interjection"



Winnie alternates aggressive rhythmic passages with short spurts of spoken interjections supported by piano flourishes. Winnie comments that she used to sweat, but now does not—even though the heat of the sun grows stronger. Winnie's body is adapting to her condition because she is becoming acclimated to a torturous situation. Winnie feels tired holding her trombone, but she cannot put it down. She keeps playing and her trombone interjections get longer and more exuberant. Winnie proclaims (mm. 361-368), "Reason says, put it down, Winnie, it's not helping you, put the thing down and get on with

something else—*trombone interjection*—I cannot. I cannot move." Winnie begs Willie to help her, but he ignores her. Her trombone playing gets wilder in response with quick, ascending glissandi. As Winnie's trombone interjections become prolonged, with less text in between, she lets out a wild laugh (m. 397) and attacks with her trombone until it begins to smoke (m. 401). Conant dramatically performs this stunt by rigging a tube on the side of her trombone to blow "smoke" (actually powder) into the air for the "pyrotechnics" (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Conant's Stunt as Winnie[58]

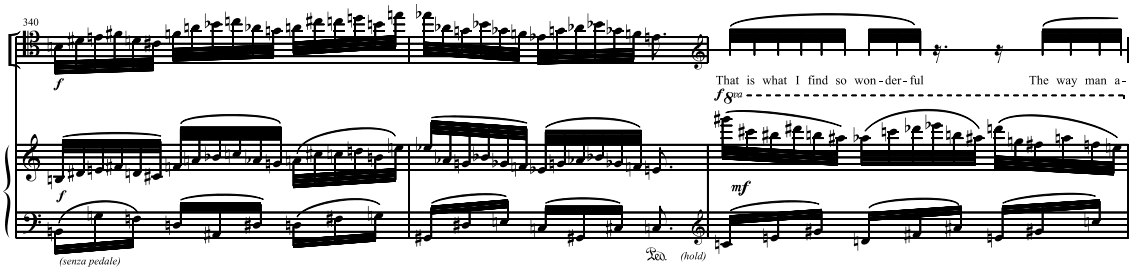
Compositional Devices Utilized in Trombone and Voice

Varied Motifs and Textures

By alternating between voice and trombone interjections, Osborne varies the texture of the music. The plethora of notes in the trombone interjections is answered by the voice with rhythmically notated text (Figure 22).

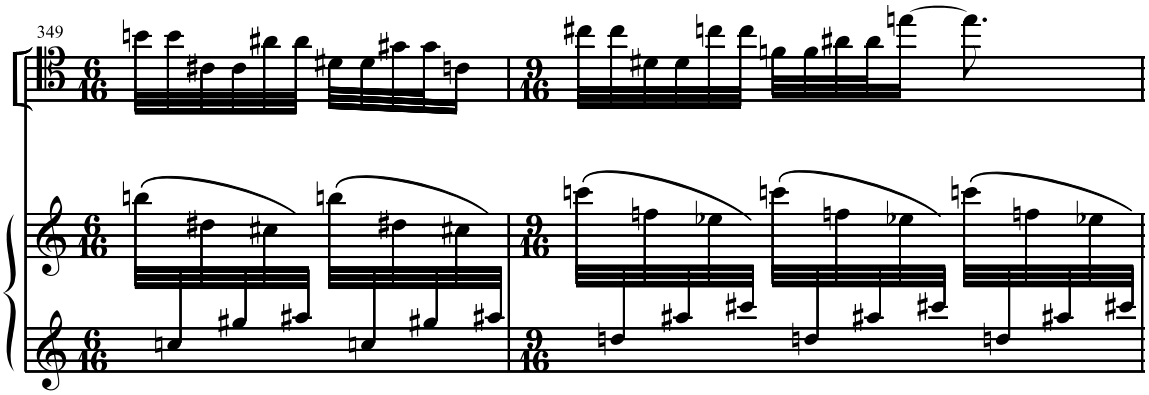
[58] Abbie Conant, from http://osborne-conant.org/press-photos/winnie%20smoke.jpg (accessed May 2013).

Figure 22: Trombone and Voice Interjections



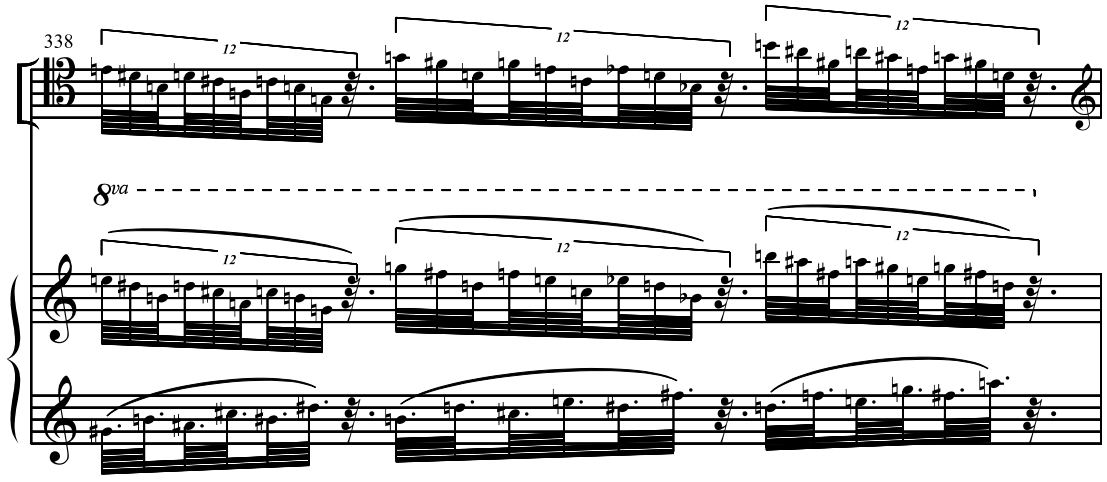
Osborne alternates between different trombone interjections. The author will refer to one trombone interjection (Figure 20 and 22) as a "Running Interjection" and another trombone interjection as the "Double Leap Motif" (Figure 23).

Figure 23: "Double Leap Motif"



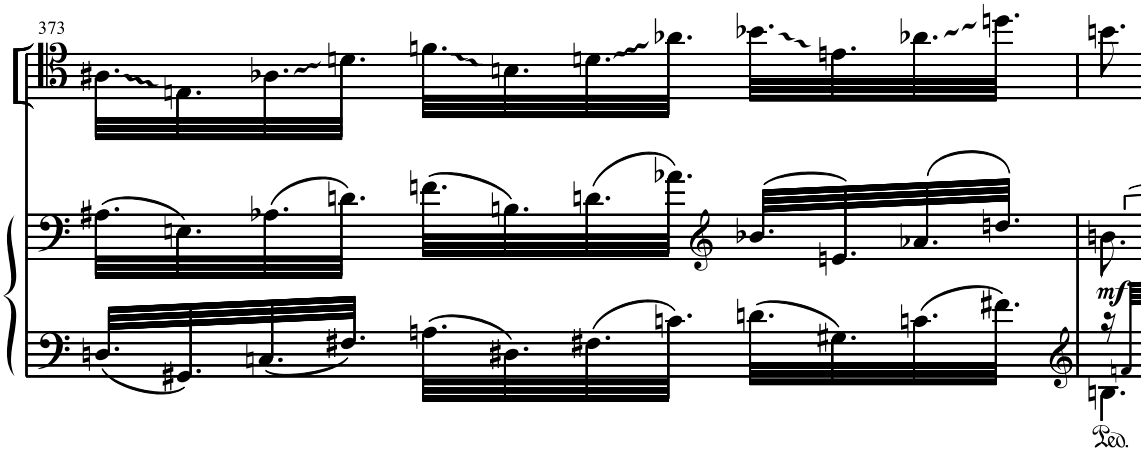
Another trombone interjection that Osborne uses in the trombone interjections is referred to as "Climbing Falls." This motif gains intensity as each descending group of twelve notes begins at a higher point and is doubled by an octave in the piano (Figure 24).

Figure 24: "Climbing Falls"



The last trombone interjection that Osborne uses is referred to as "Climbing Glissandi." These rising and falling glissandi create an out-of-control feeling as Winnie struggles, wanting to let go of her trombone (Figure 25).

Figure 25: "Climbing Glissandi"



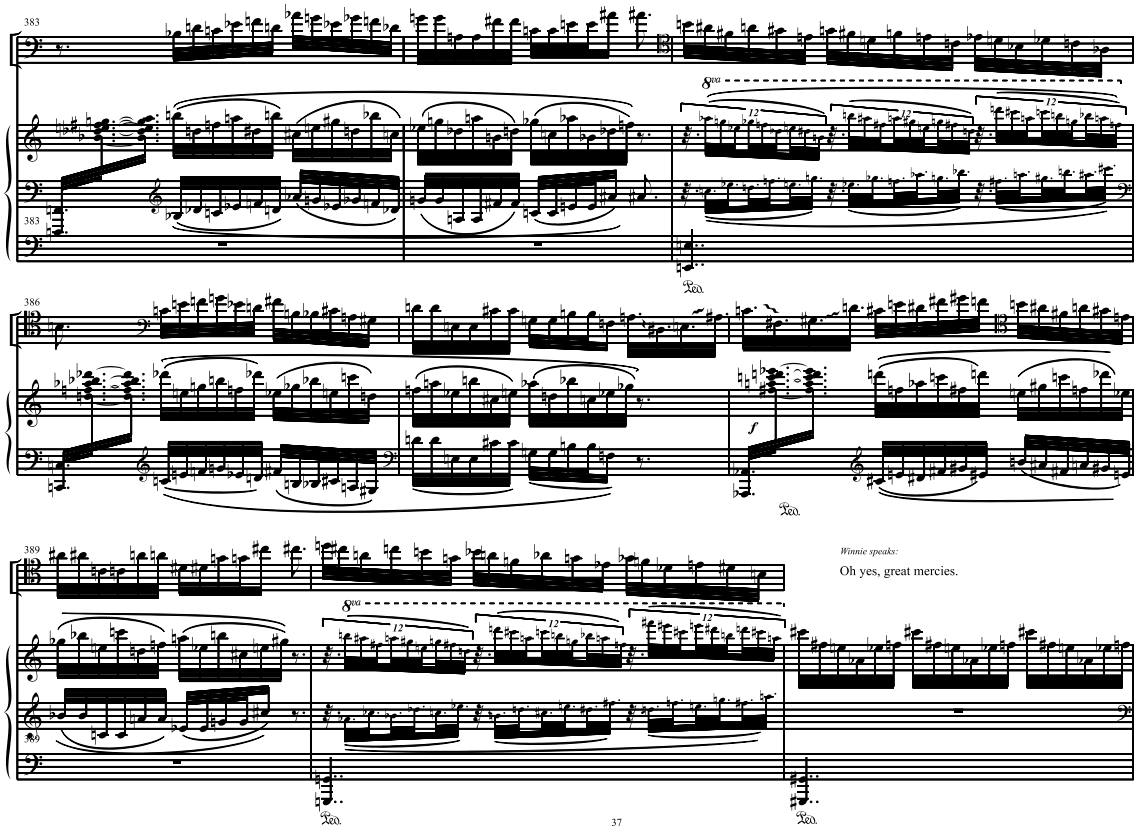
Osborne makes particular idiomatic use of the trombone in the "Climbing Glissandi" interjection. All of the glissandi are between first and seventh positions and create an

overtly dramatic gesture as Winnie extends the trombone to its full length again and again. Such an understanding of the trombone's harmonic series for the glissandi is most likely a result of Osborne's collaboration with Conant. The piano often mirrors the trombone interjections and plays light, swirling flourishes when Winnie speaks.

Building Intensity

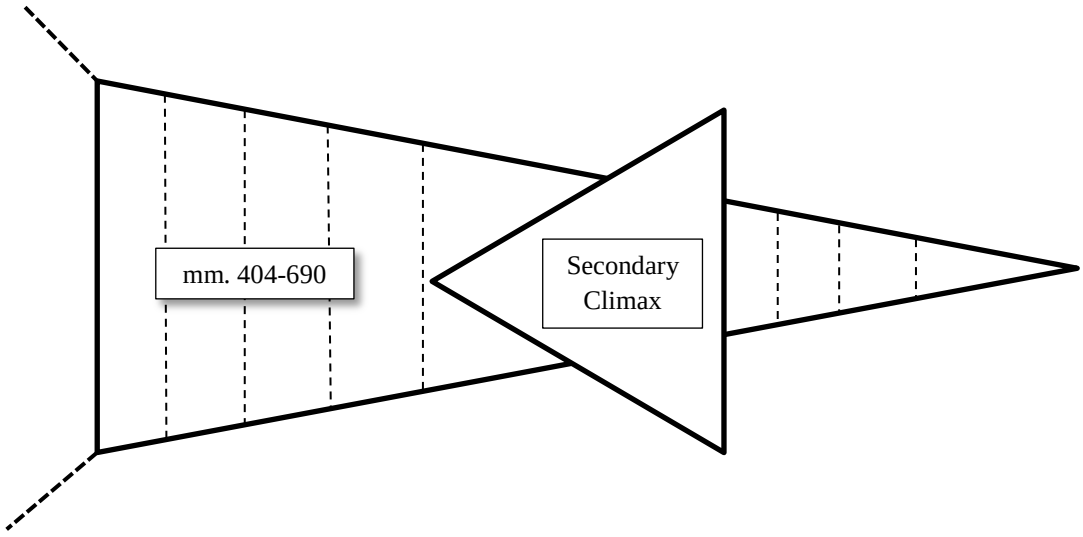
Osborne is able to build the intensity of this section by gradually extending each motif and combining the different motifs. As the trombone plays for longer periods, the vocal interjections get shorter in length (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Combined Trombone Interjections for Greater Intensity



This section comes to a dramatic climax when Winnie's trombone catches fire. Osborne is able to reach this cathartic climax by steadily building intensity and exuberance to a point of peril. When Winnie places her smoking trombone to the ground, the piano gently demurs and melds into "Morning Music" underscored by "Winnie's Melody," the first instance Osborne utilizes these motifs since the Anticipation. The return of these motifs creates a transition to Reflection section (Figure 27).

Figure 27: A.E.R. Graph: *Winnie*--Reflection



Synopsis of the Reflection

According to Osborne, the Reflection is essentially a series of theatrical beats where one beat grows to a climax, and the rest gradually dwindle to nothingness.[59] Stunned by the sudden combustion of her trombone, Winnie enters a more reflective

[59] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

mood. Winnie speaks to Willie, asking him if he remembers anything like that ever happening before. She receives no response but figures that one day (mm. 420-421), she too will "little by little be charred to a black cinder." Winnie makes several stark realizations. She realizes that her tortuous situation is all she knows—words like "temperate" and "torrid," which used to mean something to her, now mean nothing because she is constantly under the hot sun. Words have lost their meaning, memories are nearly forgotten, and what sinks into the earth essentially never existed. Sadly, Winnie says (mm. 428-430), "And should one day the earth cover my breasts, then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one have ever seen my breasts."

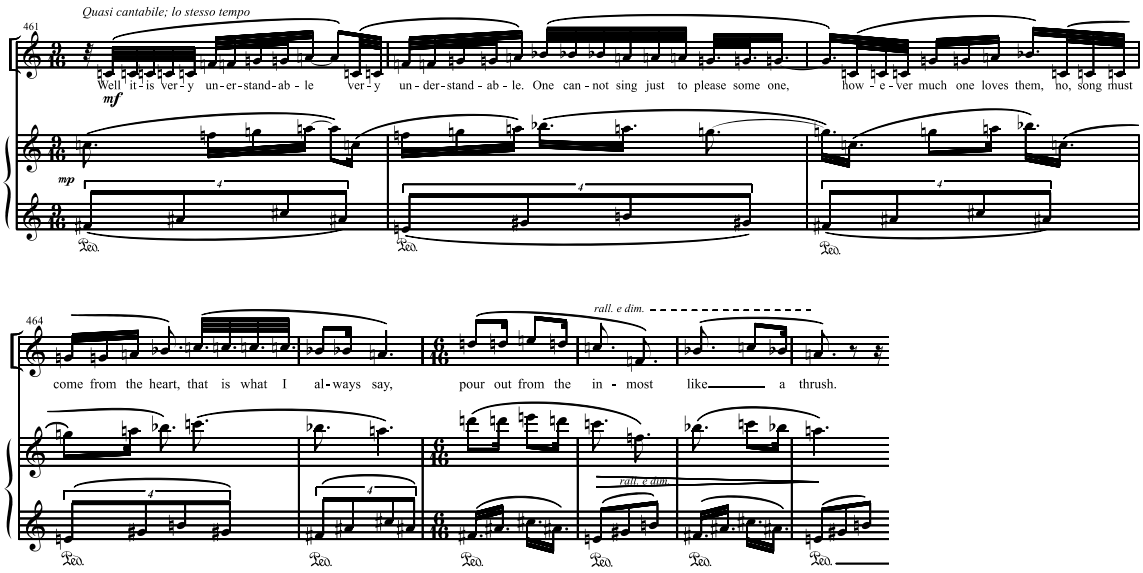
Winnie again rummages through her bag and pulls out a music box. She winds it up and listens to the tune that it produces—the waltz duet "I Love You So" from Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*. Listening to the familiar song brings Winnie happiness, and as the tune runs out, Willie sings the last five notes on the syllable "la." The fact that Willie sang makes Winnie ecstatic:

> *Increase of happy expression. She lays down [music] box.*
> Oh this will have been a happy day!
> *She claps her hands.*
> Again, Willie, again!
> *Claps.*
> Encore, Willie, please!
> *Pause. Happy expression off.*
> No? You won't do that for me?[60]

Winnie's extreme happiness is immediately met with disappointment and sadness. She counters her sadness by creating a contrafact of her own words to the pre-existing tune from *The Merry Widow* (Figure 28).

[60] William Osborne, *Winnie*, p. 42.

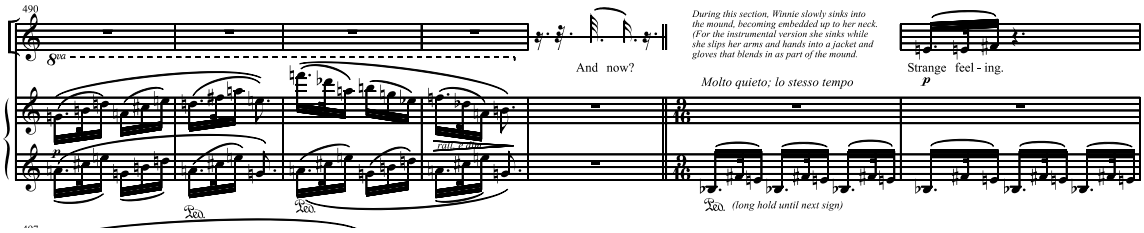
Figure 28: *Merry Widow* Quotation



The musical quotation from *The Merry Widow* creates a parallel between her own situation and that of the characters in Lehár's operetta. Just as Lehár's character Hanna tries to get the reluctant Danilo to tell her that he loves her, Winnie longs for Willie to participate in her love duet. Willie's maddening silence inspires Winnie's musical quotation, which reflects on the difficulty of singing when one's heart is not in it.

The next theatrical beat occurs after the piano plays four measures of "Contemplative Music," (mm. 490-494) and Winnie asks, "And now?" As if to answer her own question, Winnie sinks further into the ground, this time up to her neck. The left hand of the piano accompanies Winnie's descent with a recurring three-note ostinato as the right hand interjects with "Contemplative Music" (Figure 29).

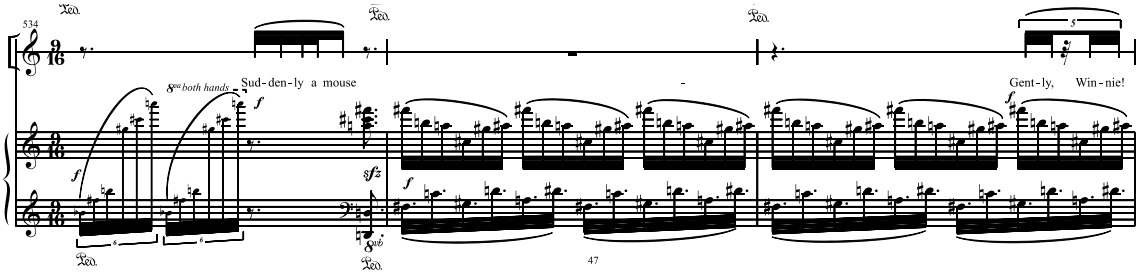
Figure 29: Winnie Sinks Further Into the Ground



Winnie comments that she has a strange feeling someone is watching her.

The next beat occurs when Winnie tells a disturbing story of a little girl named Mildred who gets up during the night to undress her doll (mm. 530-534), "Mildred…entered the nursery and began to undress dolly. Crept under the table and began to undress dolly. Scolding her the while. Suddenly a mouse!" For the most part, the right hand of the piano is in unison with Winnie's melody, but when she refers to the mouse, the piano drops out and punctuates her statement with a *sforzando* chord (Figure 30). The piano follows with a dizzying passage that distracts Winnie, for she abandons her story.

Figure 30: Winnie's Story—"Suddenly a Mouse"



By this point, Winnie realizes that the day is nearly over and that she must sing another song before going to sleep. She picks up her trombone and plays brief fragments

of "Winnie's Melody" as she rambles. Winnie talks to Willie, but does not expect an answer. She compares her sadness to the sadness she feels after having sexual intercourse: each event one step closer to death. Ironically, Winnie proclaims (m. 573), "That is what I find so wonderful." Death is both tragic and wonderful. As Winnie tries to remember other classic lines, she becomes distracted and goes back to her story about Mildred. It is not clear who "Mildred" is. She could be a character in a story that Winnie made up or a disturbing memory from her childhood. As Winnie tells her story, the piano plays frantic music as if to represent the scurrying mouse, and her piercing screams create a horrifyingly dramatic climax (Figures 31 and 32).

Figure 31: Winnie Finishes Her Story About Mildred

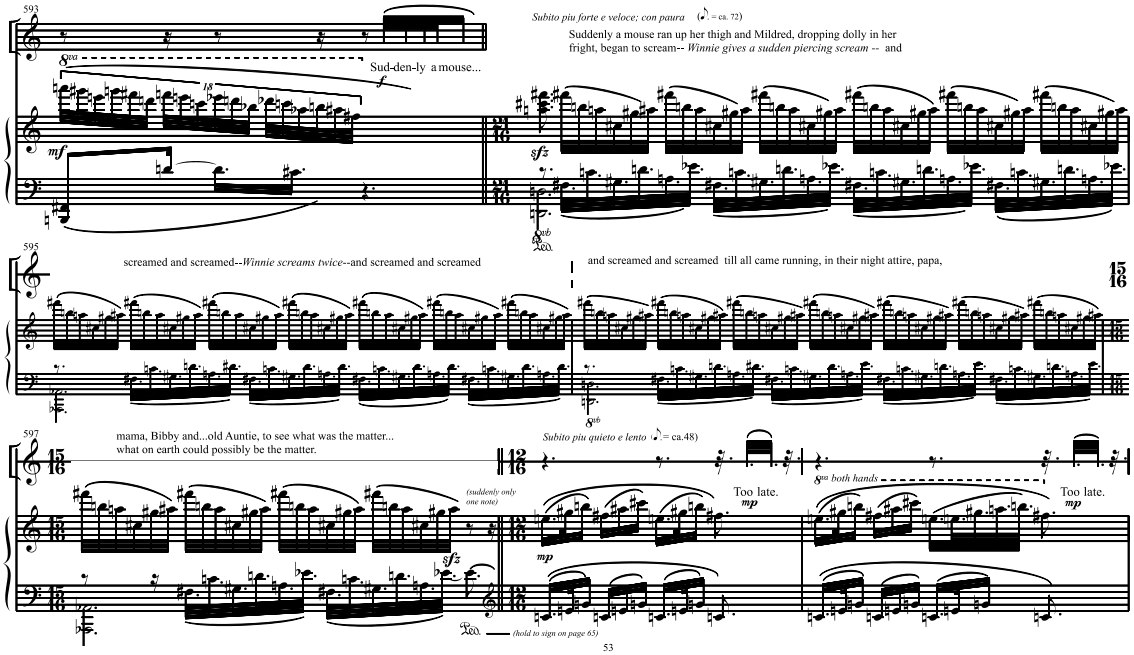
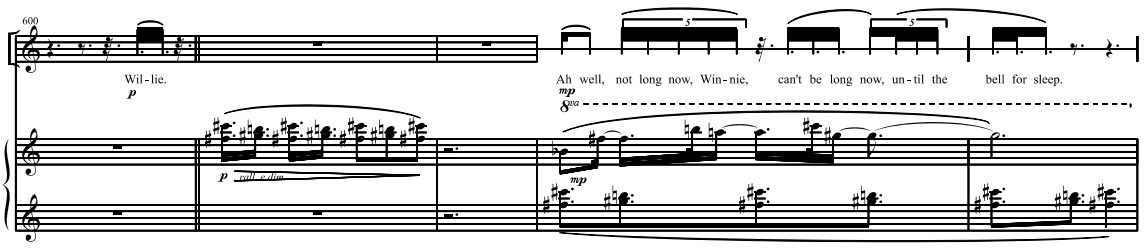


Figure 32: Conant Screams as Winnie[61]

There is a sense of uneasiness as Winnie ends her story and goes into the next theatrical beat. Both Winnie and the piano suddenly shift to soft dynamics in measures 598-599 when Winnie says, "too late." The sudden shift in dynamics from Winnie creates an abrupt end to her story. The ending to her story is unclear, but the fact that it was "too late" for Mildred suggests something ominous. Winnie knows that the day is getting closer to ending, for she says softly in measures 603-604, "Ah well, not long now, Winnie, can't be long now, until the bell for sleep" (Figure 33).

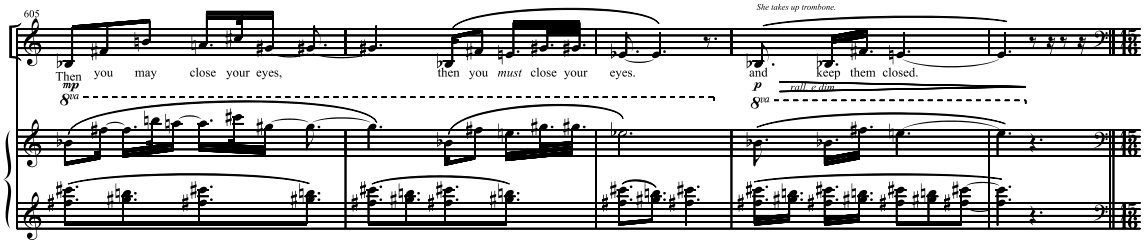
[61] Abbie Conant, from http://osborne-conant.org/press-photos2/winnie%20scream.jpg (Accessed May 2013).

Figure 33: Almost Time For the Bell for Sleep



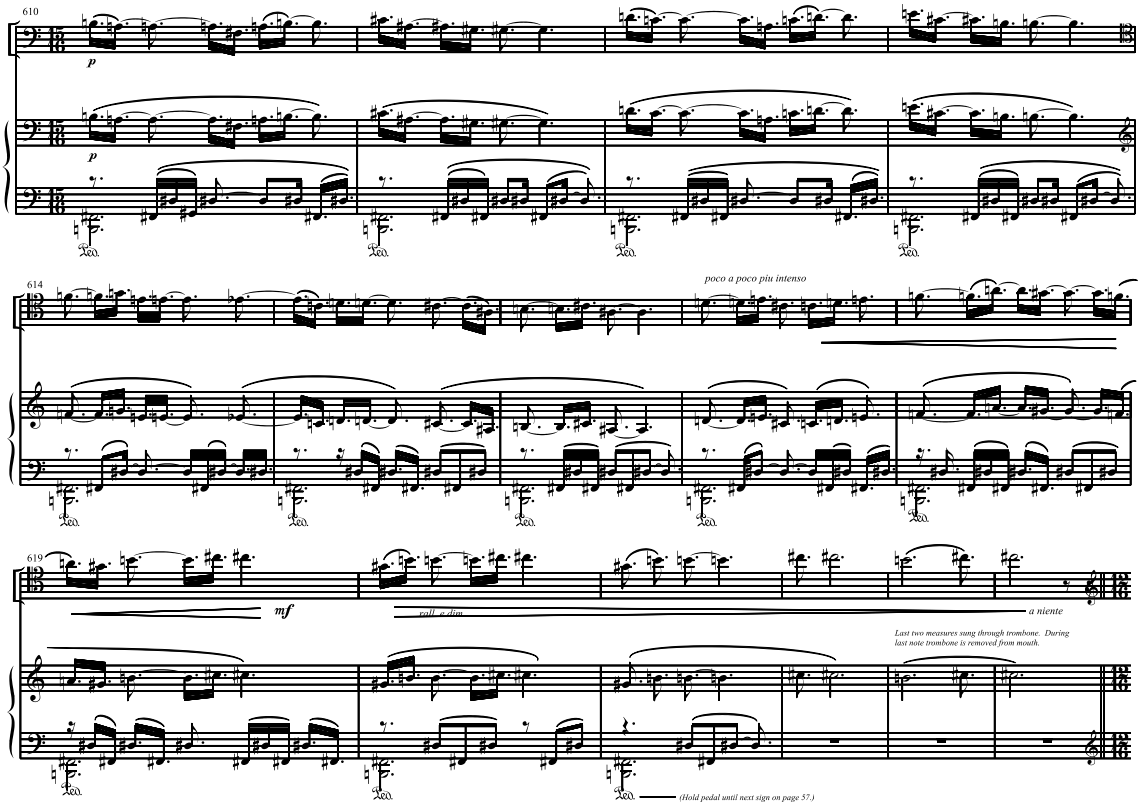
Winnie longs for sleep that melds into death. Sung to "Winnie's Melody," she sings, "Then you may close your eyes, then you *must* close your eyes. And keep them closed" (Figure 34).

Figure 34: "Close Your Eyes"



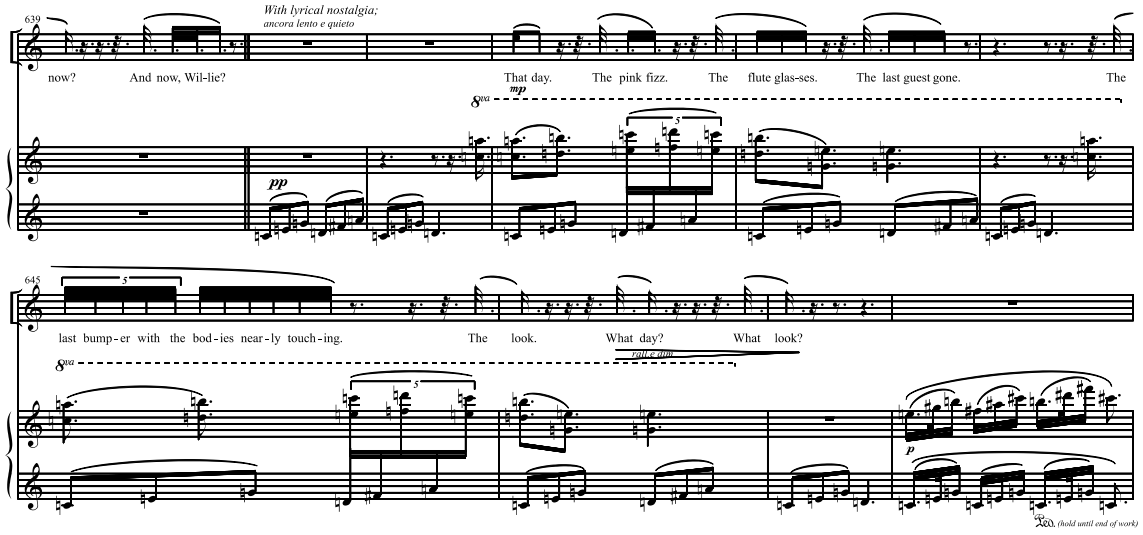
Winnie plays a mournful melody on her trombone: a slowly climbing sequence (Figure 35). The melody gradually gains intensity as it ascends into the high register and grows louder. Winnie ends the melody on a high C#, which she actually vocalizes through her trombone and gradually decrescendos to *niente*. This new technique creates a dramatic secondary climax because the fact that Winnie is singing through the trombone is not truly apparent until she lowers her trombone, only to have the sound continue.

Figure 35: Reflective Trombone Melody



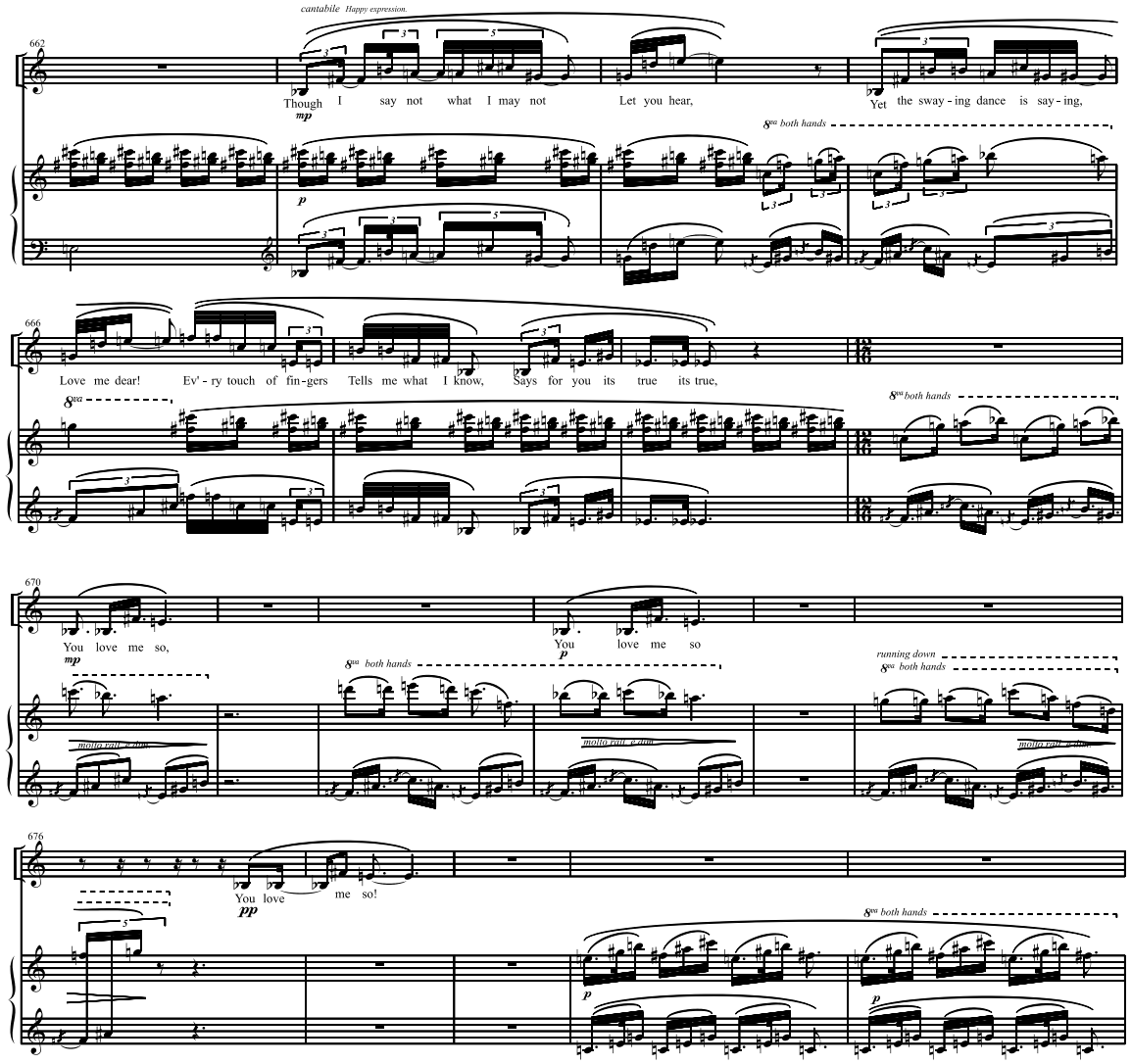
By this point in the piece, Winnie's emotional and physical exhaustion is visually and audibly apparent. She is out of words but still longs to keep going (mm. 626-628), "I can do no more. Say no more. But I must say more. Problem here." As the work gradually comes to a close, Winnie recalls the fading memory of her wedding day (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Winnie's Wedding Day



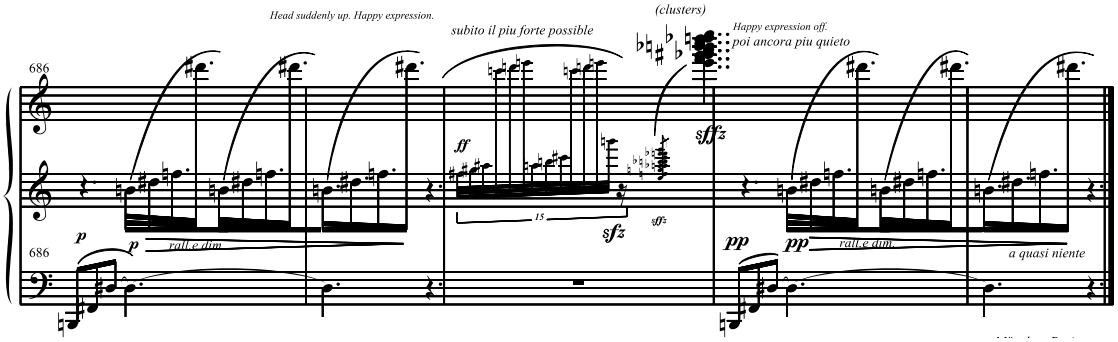
This memory brings Winnie joy, for she then says in measures 652-653, "Oh this is a happy day, this will have been another happy day! After all. So far." The confusing tense of Winnie's statement places her in the past and the future—an ambiguous place that is nearly removed from any sense of time or place. Her sense of timelessness also affects her expression. The piano plays a long nine measure (mm. 654-662) interlude of "Morning Music" underscored with "Winnie's Melody." Winnie's last words are from the text of Lehár's waltz duet "I Love You So" from *The Merry Widow*, set to "Winnie's Melody" (Figure 37). Osborne's compositional choice to adapt Lehár's original operatic text to "Winnie's Melody" is especially perceptive, for at this point, Winnie has begun to meld her own experiences and memories with those of fiction. Her grave situation has caused her to blur reality and her imagination as well as the past and the present. Singing this last song, Winnie has conjured up the happy ending that she desires: an ending in which she is loved.

Figure 37: "I Love You So" Sung to "Winnie's Melody"



The piano plays softly as Winnie begins to fall asleep with a smile on her face. She suddenly looks up with a happy expression, and the piano plays a loud, high cluster chord representing the bell for sleep. Winnie's happy expression immediately vanishes. The piano quietly dwindles to nothingness (Figure 38).

Figure 38: Bell for Sleep



This last punch line lets the audience know that Winnie has not achieved the peaceful state of rest or death that she desired. Her day will soon begin again. Little hope is offered, except for the fact that the audience is aware of Winnie's optimistic personality. Winnie will continue as always—performing her morning ablutions, saying her prayers, quoting the classics, chattering to herself and to Willie, telling stories, and reliving fond memories—while confronting loneliness, timelessness, and thoughts of death.

Compositional Devices Utilized in the Reflection

Varied Motifs and Textures

In order to present a textural change from the intensity brought by the climax of Winnie's trombone combusting, Osborne brings back motifs that have not been heard since the Anticipation: "Morning Music," "Winnie's Melody," "Contemplative Music," and "Rummaging Music." Osborne uses these familiar motifs and melodies as transition music, to bring out themes and moods, and to establish changes in texture. Osborne also introduces a new motif: both the piano and Winnie quote "I Love You So," the waltz duet from Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow.* Beckett's *Happy Days* also references *The Merry Widow*, but Osborne's musical integration of the actual melody in both the voice and the

piano truly bring the song to life. Osborne's setting of "I Love You So" to "Winnie's Melody" makes the words that Winnie sings much more heartfelt and true, further emphasizing her longing for love and companionship.

Gestural Flourishes

As with the entire work, in the Reflection, Osborne also uses coordinated gestural flourishes in the piano. Though there are fewer instances of this usage, the most notable occurrences are when Winnie sings about Mildred and the mouse and at the very end of the piece where the cluster chord represents the bell for sleep.

Varied Vocal and Instrumental Treatments

Osborne continues to employ alternating vocal treatments to Winnie's lines of text, but her melodies are less virtuosic and much simpler in the Reflection. The reason for this is that Winnie is physically and emotionally exhausted by this point in the piece / day. Since Winnie has taken on a more reflective nature, she does not whimsically proclaim her lines in the *coloratura* style. Instead, Osborne strongly utilizes rhythmically notated texts accompanied lightly by the piano. Her noticeable loss of energy evokes an inner sense of sadness. A brief glimpse of Winnie's earlier optimism is brought back when Willie mutters the end of "I Love You So." Her joyful response to his brief utterance is unaccompanied by the piano, which makes the fact that he refuses to sing any more for her that much more dramatic—a silent slap in the face. Perhaps the most integrated instrumental and vocal treatment that Osborne employs is when Winnie sings through her trombone (mm.623-624) at the end of a lyrical melody. Conant performed Berio's *Sequenza V* at about the same time that Osborne began writing his first Beckett productions, and they worked very closely together on the piece. It is reasonable to

assume that Osborne's exposure to the *Sequenza V* influenced his writing for trombone in *Winnie.* In fact, Berio's *Sequenza V* can be viewed as a direct antecedent to the chamber music theater genre, for it is one of the first works for trombone that blends solo trombone with theater, placing an emphasis on extended techniques. An even deeper connection can be drawn between the work of Berio and the work of Beckett and Osborne. Berio's characterization of Grock the clown through the trombonist is not dramatically distant from Beckett and Osborne's characterization of Winnie. Both Grock and Winnie are outwardly happy and optimistic and deeply sad within—always longing for true companionship, yet unable to fulfill their desire.[62] Conant recalls working on *Sequenza V* with Osborne:

> I had been exposed to the Berio *Sequenza* when I was at the University of New Mexico—it was the first thing my teacher played for me. And so the Berio was my first chance to really mix theater and trombone playing…Being a composer, he [Osborne] could just look at the piece and pick out the phrases. He had the language to really analyze it, which was really helpful. I had also taken a pantomime course as an elective at the University of New Mexico, so I understood the concept of having a "clean slate." If the body is very plain, then any gesture you make is very articulated. People seemed to really respond to my performances of the Berio.[63]

This compositional technique gives new meaning to both Winnie's trombone playing and her vocal expression, erasing all boundaries that may have previously existed. This further blurring of Winnie's worlds—what is fact and fiction, past and present, her voice or her trombone—is manifested in this dramatic singing and instrumental technique.

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[62] More information about Grock can be found in his autobiography: *Die Memoiren des Königs der Clowns* (English version, *Grock: King of Clowns*, 1957).

[63] Osborne and Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (Taos, NM 2012).

Use of Silence and Space

The Reflection contains more silence and space than any previous section, which is effective in bringing the work to a subtle close. Osborne prescribes silence and space in a variety of ways. As the Reflection ensues, Osborne uses more rests in between the lines of text that Winnie speaks and also within lines of text—breaking up phrases into smaller pieces. This textual breakup is appropriate since Winnie is buried up to her neck in the ground (Figure 39).

Figure 39: Conant Plays Her Trombone Buried in the Ground[64]

Osborne also reduces the texture of the piano accompaniment as the work comes to a close, often including measures of rests at a time, which assists in bringing the drama to its end.

[64] Abbie Conant, from http://osborne-conant.org/press-photos/winnie%20closeup.jpg (accessed May 2013).

Summary of Reflection

The Reflection arrives almost directly after the first major climax of the work. Osborne is able outline the new section with textural shifts and a steady decrease in dramatic and musical action. In order to produce a more reflective mood, Osborne brings back motifs and melodies that were introduced at the beginning of the work including "Winnie's Melody," "Morning Music," "Contemplative Music," and "Rummaging Music." These familiar motifs allow both Winnie and the audience to reflect on her worsening situation. Osborne also includes the reference to *The Merry Widow*, and he gives the tune new meaning by setting the words to "Winnie's Melody" at the close of the work.

A.E.R. Structure Conclusions

Though Osborne's setting and adaptation of Beckett's *Happy Days* into *Winnie* was done purely by his musical intuition, he later discovered that his work contained a unique underlying formal structure: A.E.R. structure. The A.E.R. structure would provide Osborne with an outline which would be the formal basis of his later original works. This three-part formal structure—Anticipation, Event, Reflection—is clearly denoted by Osborne's use of motifs and textural shifts. At a macro level, this variance of motifs and texture outline the basic A.E.R. form, and at a micro level, Osborne's constant alternations between motifs and compositional devices allow each theatrical beat to organically unfold, creating a living, breathing dramatic production. The following graphs (Figures 40 and 41) trace Osborne's use of motifs and textures across the A.E.R. formal structure and reveal both macro and micro three-part forms.

Figure 40: Motivic Analysis Within A.E.R. Structure in *Winnie*

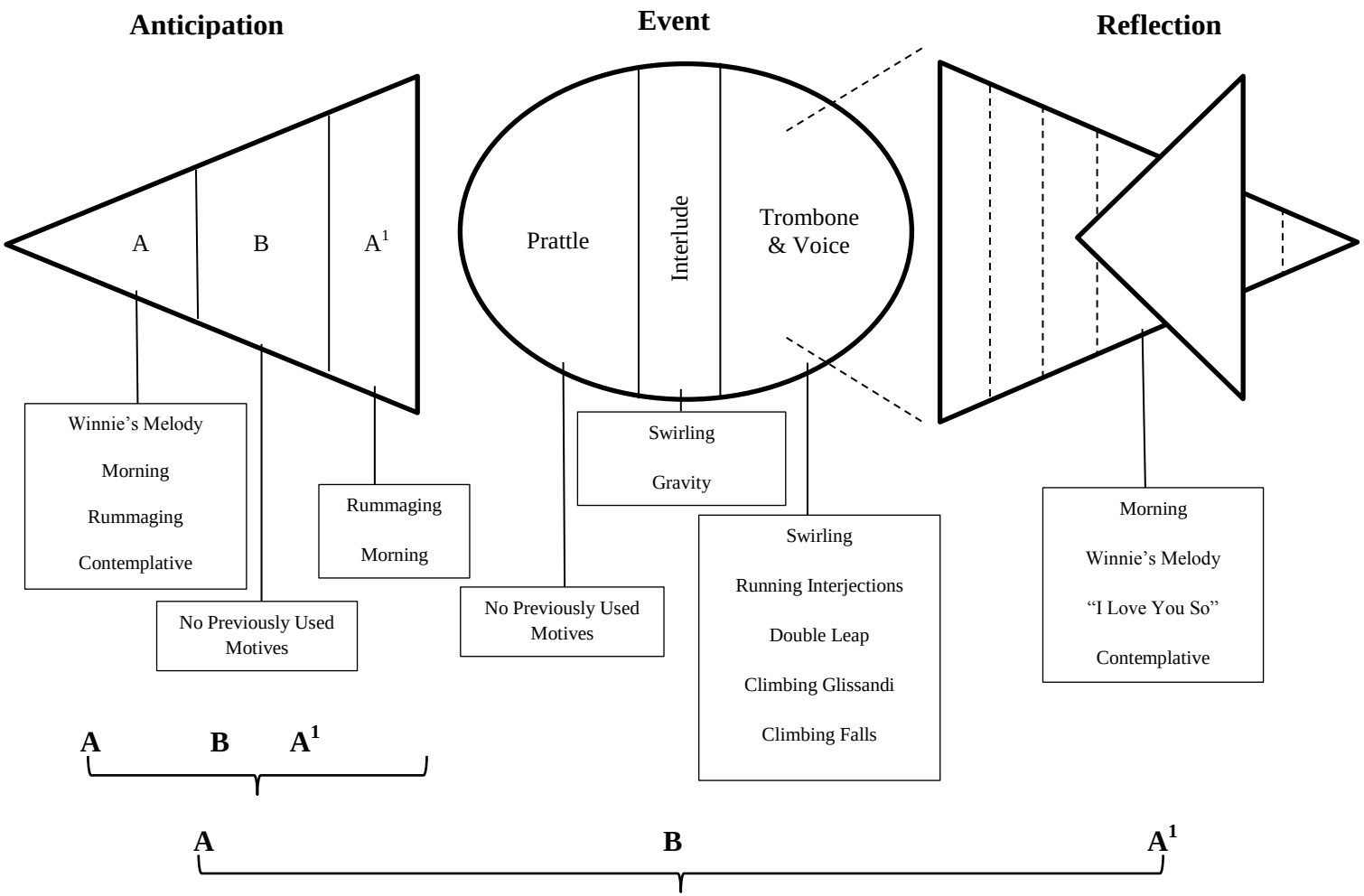
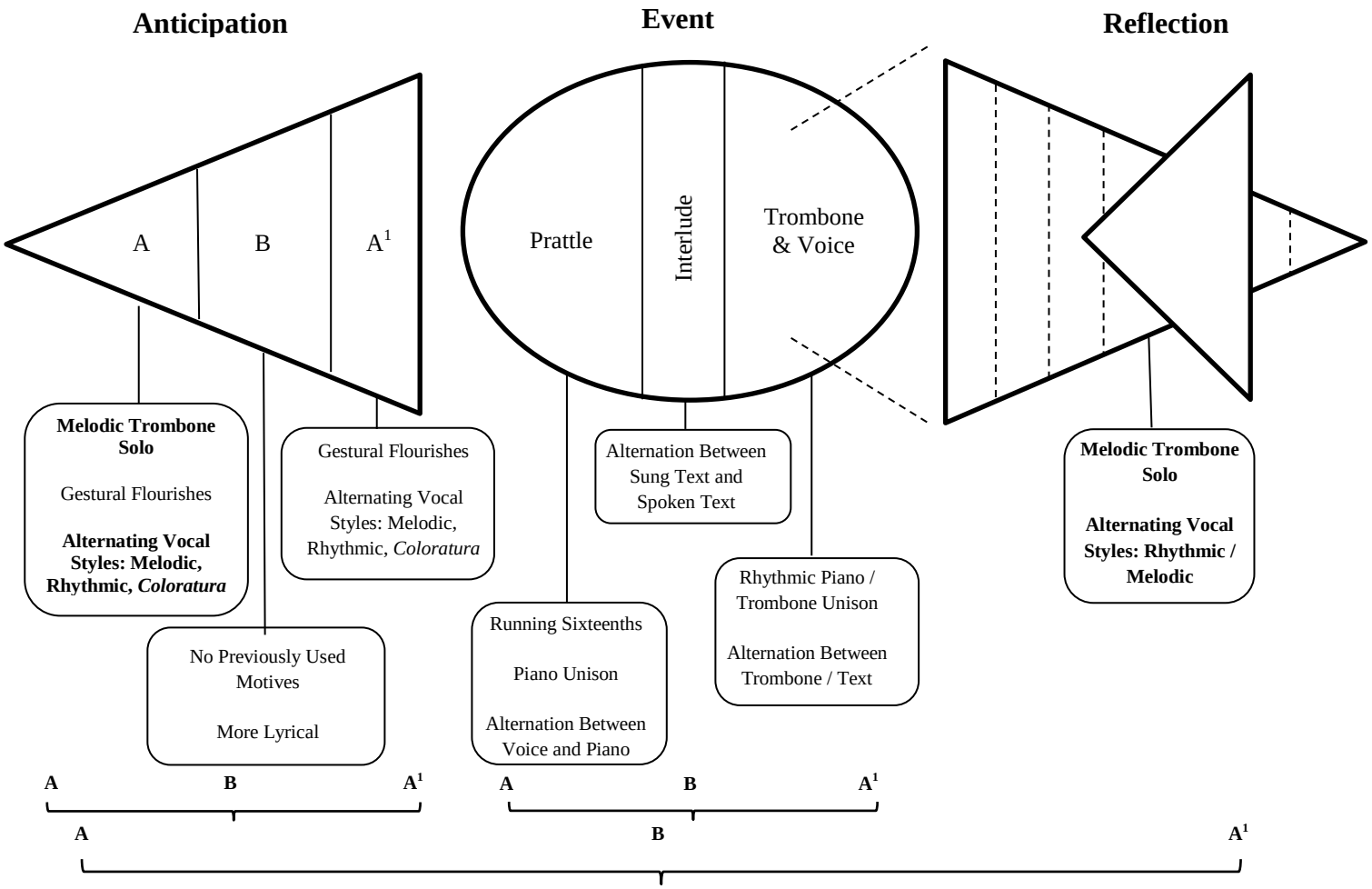


Figure 41: Textural Analysis Graph Within A.E.R. Structure in *Winnie*



CHAPTER THREE

MIRIAM: THE CHAIR (1988)

Background and Context

Miriam is a chamber music theater trilogy for soprano, optional trombone, and piano. It was composed for trombonist Abbie Conant by William Osborne. Conant writes, "*Miriam* is an example of a human trying to create art out of pain. The work was written in reaction to the egregious gender discrimination I experienced in the Munich Philharmonic during my thirteen year tenure there. My husband also felt deep pain at seeing his wife abused, which led him to compose *Miriam.*"[65] Formally based on his earlier chamber music theater work *Winnie*, *Miriam* is the first work in which Osborne wrote the libretto in addition to the musical and theatrical content. The three parts of the trilogy are as follows: *The Mirror, The Chair,* and *The River.* Conant describes the *Miriam* trilogy:

> The Trilogy shows us what is behind each of the three doors of the subjective perception of a woman. In general, we experience a universal anima and feminine spirit. We experience a woman's spirit of creativity caught in the poisoned landscape of patriarchy. We experience a world where the feminine is not truly seen, where it is not taken seriously, and where it is instrumentally zed and deeply violated.[66]

For the purposes of this project, the author will focus on the second part of the trilogy: *The Chair* since Conant most often performs *The Chair* as a stand-alone work. The other parts of *Miriam* will be briefly described in order to place *The Chair* in proper context. Part One, *The Mirror* is a musical pantomime depicting Miriam's identity crisis and attempted suicide. Part Three, *The River,* shows Miriam beside a symbolic river

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[65] Abbie Conant, http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#diving, June 2011 (accessed February 2013).

[66] Ibid.

slowly issuing gestures of taking her infant daughter from the water and letting her go to float down the river as she sings. Symbolic references can be linked to the Biblical character Miriam, sister to Moses, who placed her baby brother in a basket in the river to avoid his death.

Setting the Stage

Part Two, *Miriam: The Chair*—the audience finds Miriam confined to a chair in a mental institution. Conant describes the chair that Miriam is confined to as, "…a chair only experienced in a nightmare, part child's high chair, part torture chair, part electric chair, part symbol of a woman in the straitjacket of an abusive marriage, contextualized by modern day patriarchy."[67] Note Osborne's initial stage directions for *Miriam: The Chair*:

> Miriam is in an asylum. She is wearing a dirty, worn, white, sleeveless night gown extending past her knees. She is unkempt. She sits in a large, heavy austere wooden chair. Her lap and legs are covered with a white blanket.
>
> Attached to the stage right side of the chair is a dowel holding a musical instrument. On each arm rest is a spring loaded clamp, trigger-able to lock her wrists in place. Swiveled on the right arm is a small table, currently positioned in front of her, covered with small objects, and rotatable to the side of the chair. A thick dowel with a cross piece at the top rises about 40 centimeters from the center back of the chair. A heavy hemp rope is twined about the cross piece with one end looped over the stage left of the chair back. A white gauze veil is draped over the dowel and rope. Two rests extend from the lower front legs of the chair to support her feet.
>
> She holds before her face a white plaster mask that leaves her mouth uncovered. It has a short, white handle on the stage left side, and the eyes are cut to give the appearance of weeping. Light rises slowly on the mask, and then the chair as she begins to sing. All else is darkness.[68]

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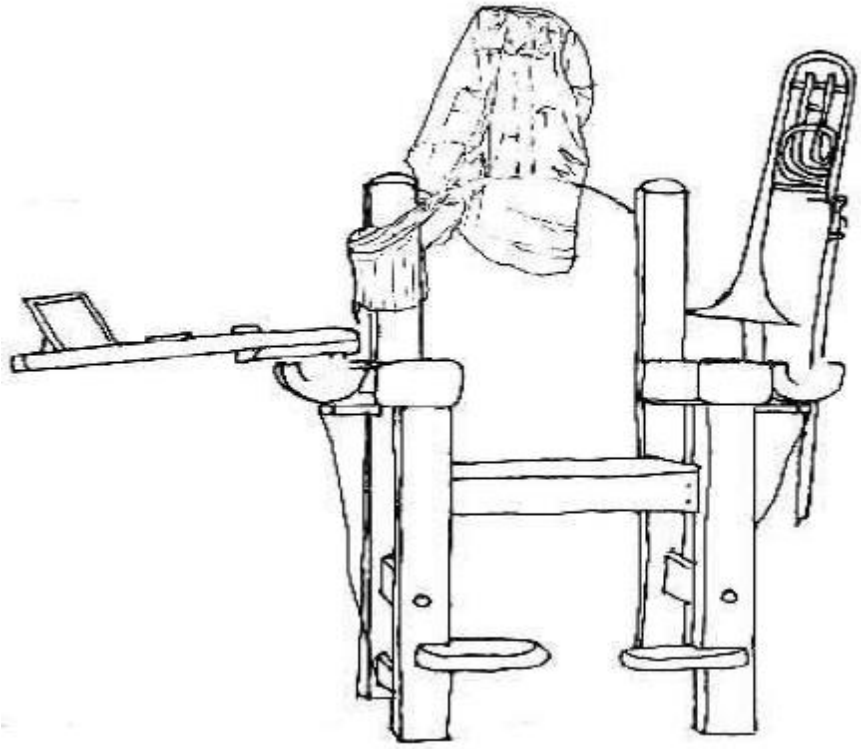
[67] Abbie Conant, http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#diving, June 2011 (accessed February 2013).

[68] William Osborne, "*Miriam, Part II: The Chair*, a chamber music theater work for soprano and piano with an optional instrumental part." (Klein Hohenrain, Germany, 1988. Revised Spring 2013).

To view Osborne's artistic rendering of Miriam's chair, see Figure 42 below.

Figure 42: Miriam's Chair[69]



Synopsis of *Miriam: The Chair*

As the light rises on Miriam, she is in her chair with a mask before her face. She then commences her attempt to compose a music theater piece to perform for her children when they come to visit her. As she writes furiously in her notebook, she realizes that she does not have the right words at her disposal. The fact that Miriam cannot express herself frustrates her to no end. She is worried that when her children come, they will just stand there and look at her. As Miriam continues to struggle to find the words to express herself, she confronts the many stereotypical masks and roles that have been forced upon

[69] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair.*

her as a woman. Miriam experiences a vast array of emotions as she tells her story and plays her trombone as another medium of expression. She even resorts to self-inflicted pain as a way to dredge up the words she so desperately wishes to express. As dark and harrowing as *Miriam: The Chair* is, the work ends on a hopeful note, as Miriam is determined that she will find the words and share her voice.

Feminist Themes and Concepts

As discussed earlier, the *Miriam* trilogy was composed as a reaction to the personal experiences of gender discrimination that Abbie Conant faced during her thirteen year tenure with the Munich Philharmonic. Self-proclaimed feminists and advocates for women in the arts, Osborne and Conant portray the treatment of women and artistically express their feminist ideals in their chamber music theater works. *Miriam: The Chair* presents many feminist themes and concepts, which will be addressed.

Osborne discusses various ideas that he and Conant express in *Miriam: The Chair* in his web article, "*Miriam* and Our Theories of Chamber Music Theater." Osborne and Conant believe that there is a direct relationship between language, creativity, and identity. Furthermore, they believe that the "pursuit of a creative identity is fundamental to human dignity, and people who are denied that freedom can develop existential, spiritual, and psychological problems."[70] Miriam is a perfect example of someone who is denied the pursuit of a creative identity. She is relegated to a torturous chair in an asylum, all essence of human dignity stripped from her. Though she longs to create a music

[70] William Osborne, http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#essay, April 2011 (accessed February 2013).

theater work for her children, she cannot generate the words. Miriam is in every sense shackled by inarticulateness.

A.E.R. Structure

Miriam: The Chair adheres formally to the A.E.R. structure that Osborne discovered in *Winnie.* In an email to the author, Osborne writes:

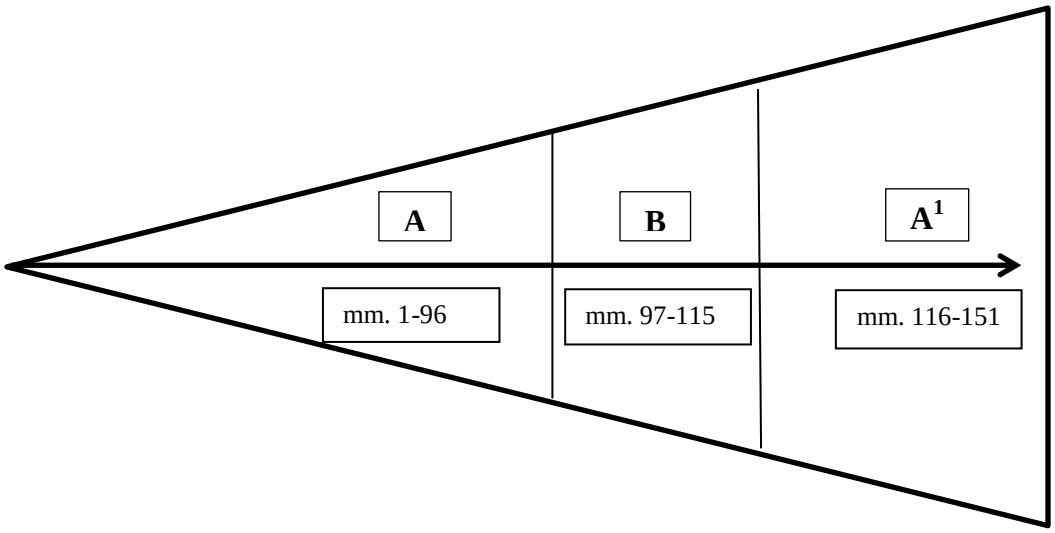
> …the A.E.R. structure of *Winnie* is the model for almost all of my works. *Miriam* was the first work where I wrote my own text. I modeled it very closely on *Winnie* which required a lot of analysis of what I did purely by intuition in *Winnie*. It was while writing *Miriam* that I developed the A.E.R. theory of structure and formulated many of the theoretical concepts of text writing I use.[71]

Compositionally, Osborne utilizes similar techniques that he employed in *Winnie* including motifs to represent themes, moods, and actions; gestural flourishes that coordinate with stage directions; varied vocal treatments; elements of silence and space; and textural shifts that outline formal structure. In the next sections, the author will outline the A.E.R. structure and Osborne's compositional techniques. This formal structure helps propel the narrative and shape Miriam's emotional journey. Conant shares how being aware of the formal structure of Osborne's works helps her to deliver an expressive performance: "The structure of the piece informs the subjective emotional and energetic arc for the actor, which helps them pace and develop the flow of emotions and energy to create an integrated, impactful whole…having the structure in mind shapes the resonance of the words."[72]

[71] William Osborne, email to Jessica Ducharme (February 13, 2013).

[72] Abbie Conant, http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-video.htm#diving, June 2011 (accessed February 2013).

Figure 43: A.E.R. Graph: *Miriam: The Chair*—Anticipation



Synopsis of the Anticipation

The work begins with the character Miriam sitting in her asylum chair in a white night gown with a mask before her face. She begins singing in measures 1-4 what are presumably the first few lines of her music theater piece that she is writing: "Singing to herself, no river flow on, deep water—the flood at last, singing to the river, child of night, let her go, let her go." The piano then plays a furious running-thirty-second note passage to which Miriam vigorously writes in her manuscript. This music is similar to the "Rummaging Music" motif, which was featured in *Winnie*, and the author will refer to this motif as "Writing Music." Each time this motif is played on the piano, Miriam writes in her manuscript. The A section, of the three-part Anticipation, features Miriam going back and forth between singing her opening melody, writing in her manuscript, commenting on how all of the words she writes are "empty," and singing about how her children will soon visit. The B section is a bit more lyrical—Osborne indicates that it is to

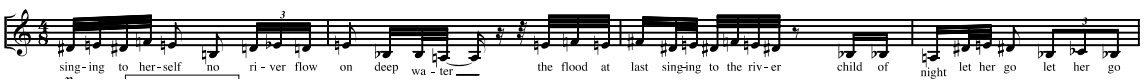
be performed *Cantabile; non troppo lento.* In the B section, Miriam flips through a dictionary searching for words to use in her music theater piece. As she flips through the pages, she sings various words including gondolum, gondolier, gondolet, gone, gone-by, gonium, gone goose, and gone-ness, periodically reading the definitions aloud. The third section of the Anticipation, A^1, begins with the "Writing Music" motif and Miriam writing in her manuscript once again. She continues similarly to what she did in the previous A section. The section escalates as Miriam vigorously cranks her pencil sharpener. She finally gets frustrated and tears the pages out of her manuscript and flings them up in the air.

Compositional Devices Utilized in the Anticipation

Varied Motifs

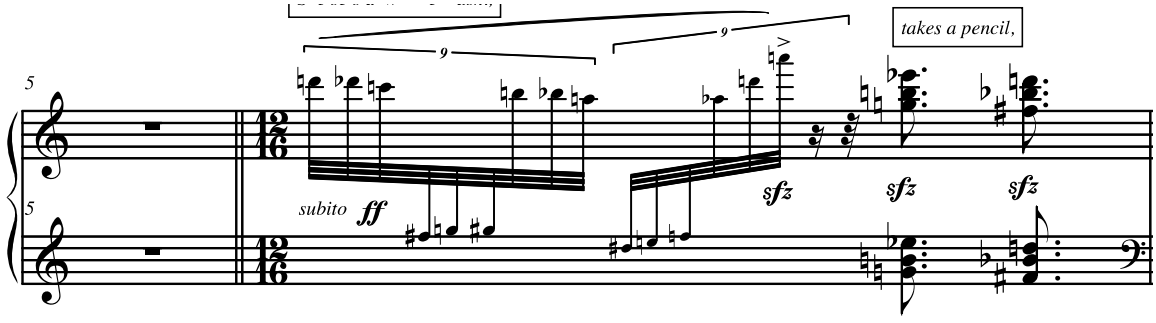
Osborne utilizes many different motifs in the Anticipation that he brings back throughout the whole work. These motifs help to establish various moods and themes, and some motifs are associated with specific actions that Miriam performs. The first motif that Osborne introduces occurs within the first four measures of the work and is sung by Miriam alone. The author will refer to this motif as the "Singing to Herself" motif. This melody sits in the lower tessitura of the female vocal range and features recurring half-steps (Figure 44).

Figure 44: "Singing to Herself" Motif



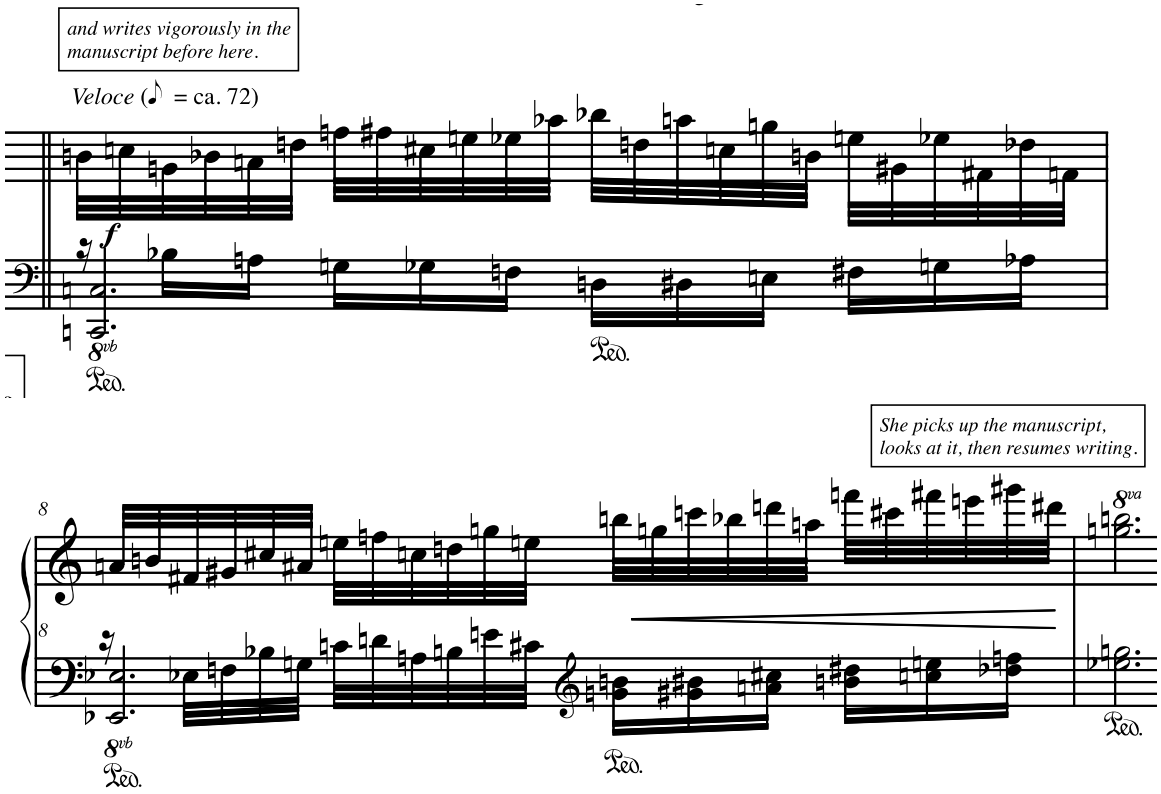
The second motif that Osborne introduces is a set of punctuated augmented chords that descend chromatically. These piano chords, which the author will refer to as "Augmented Punches" are typically played before an element of drama unfolds, and the augmented nature of the chords establishes a suspenseful mood (Figure 45). Osborne writes two chords in measure six before Miriam writes in her manuscript. The first chord is an E-flat augmented chord, followed by a D augmented chord. Osborne uses "Augmented Punches" throughout the entire work in varied forms; in fact, this is the only motif that occurs in each major section of the work.

Figure 45: "Augmented Punches"



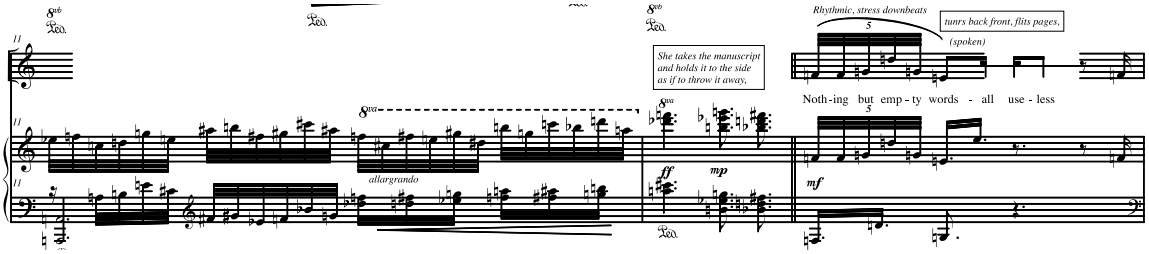
The third motif that Osborne introduces in the Anticipation is played by the piano and is referred to by the author as "Writing Music." This motif perfectly reflects Miriam's need to creatively express herself, for the motif is frantic and almost desperate. Osborne's stage directions indicate that Miriam "writes vigorously in the manuscript before her" (m. 7). Similar to "Rummaging Music" from *Winnie*, "Writing Music" features running thirty-second notes that meander up and down the range of the piano (Figure 46).

Figure 46: "Writing Music"



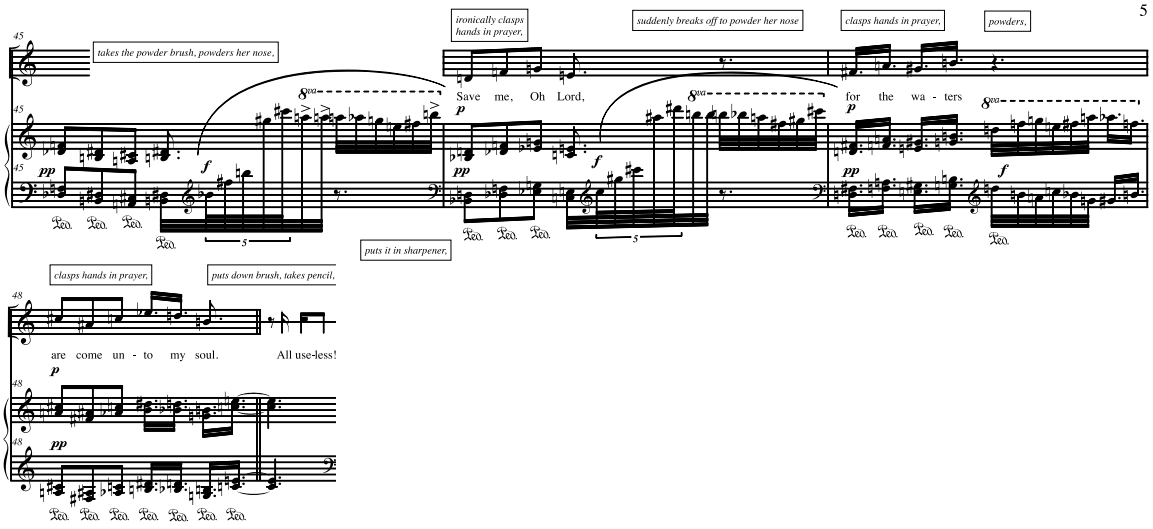
The fourth motif that Osborne introduces in the Anticipation is sung by Miriam and doubled in the piano. The author will refer to this motif as the "Empty Words" motif. The first time Osborne uses this motivic vocal style is when Miriam comments about what she wrote in her manuscript singing, "Nothing but empty words" in measure thirteen. Osborne establishes the rhythmic nature of the "Empty Words" motif by writing a single note for each syllable of Miriam's text. The rhythmic nature is also reinforced when the piano commonly doubles the voice, further emphasizing both the melody and the text (Figure 47).

Figure 47: "Empty Words" Motif



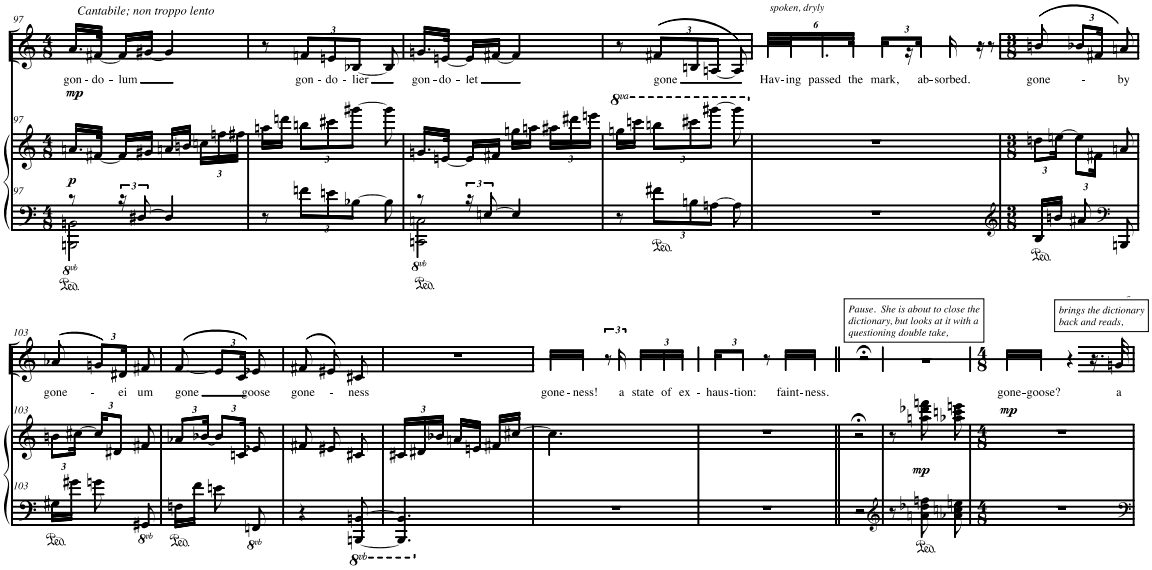
The fifth motif that Osborne introduces in the Anticipation is a joint motif between the voice and the piano. This motif is meant to represent a portion of Miriam's music theater piece that she is composing and will be referred to by the author as "Prayer Music" because Osborne indicates in the stage directions that Miriam "ironically clasps hands in prayer." (m. 46) "Prayer Music" features the piano playing rising and falling intervals of major thirds (Figure 48). Miriam sings her text on the upper note of the major third interval.

Figure 48: "Prayer Music"



While the A section of the Anticipation features five motifs, the B section, which is more lyrical in nature, only features one new motif. The B section begins (m. 97) when Miriam flips through her dictionary searching for useable words. Osborne indicates that Miriam sings in a *Cantabile; non troppo lento*[73] style (Figure 49).

Figure 49: *Cantabile; non troppo lento* B Section Melody



The only other previously used motif that occurs in the B section of the Anticipation is the "Augmented Punches" motif; however, it is more subtle and has a *mezzo piano* dynamic rather than an aggressive *sforzando* articulation (m. 110). At the same time that the piano plays "Augmented Punches" (mm. 109-110), the stage directions indicate, "Pause. She [Miriam] is about to close the dictionary, but looks at it with a questioning double take." In this instance, the "Augmented Punches" prepare the drama of Miriam's double take of the dictionary that she is reading.

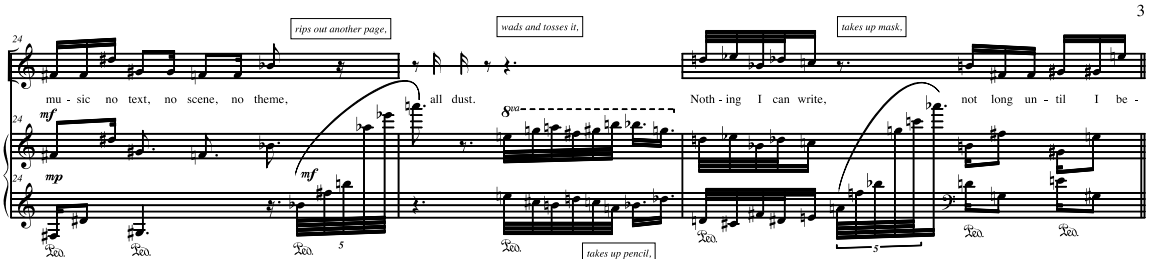
[73] Italian meaning, "A singing style, not too slow."

The A^1 section of the Anticipation features "Writing Music," "Prayer Music," the "Singing to Herself" motif, and "Augmented Punches." Osborne utilizes these previously heard motifs in similar ways that he did in the A section of the Anticipation.

Gestural Flourishes

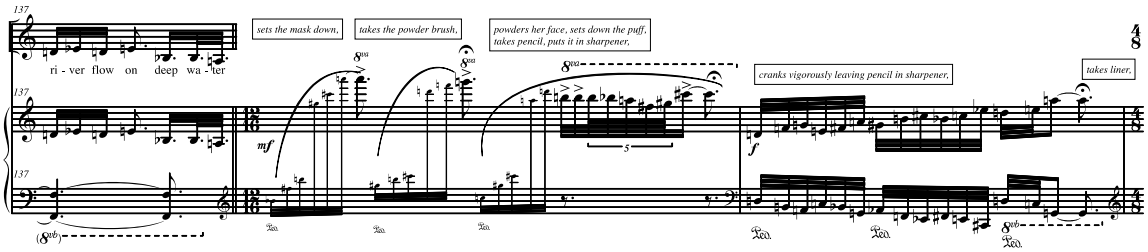
Osborne utilizes gestural flourishes that coordinate with stage directions as a means of musically highlighting the drama that unfolds on stage. These quick, gestural flourishes often interrupt whatever melody the piano was playing previously, which highlights the actions of Miriam on the stage, creating a choreographed dance or interplay of music and gesture. Osborne uses this technique in isolated moments (mm. 24-27) when Miriam is instructed to "rip out another page" and "take up mask" (Figure 50).

Figure 50: Gestural Flourishes in Piano



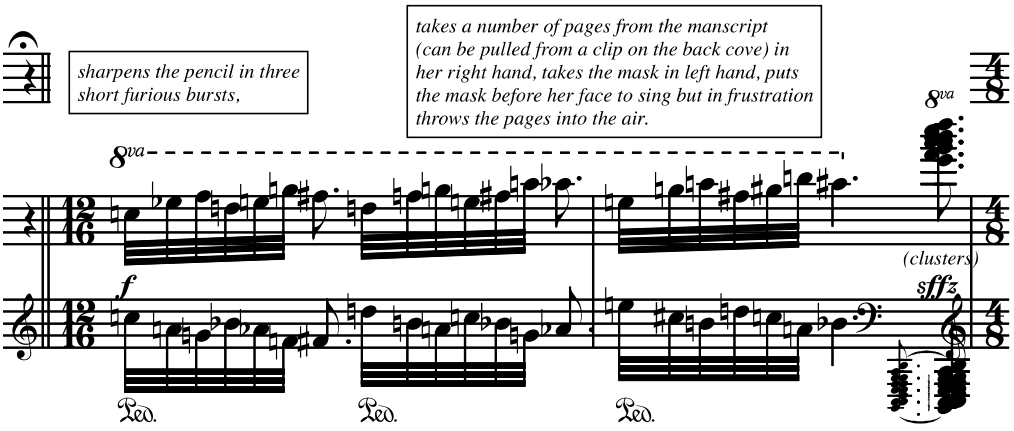
Osborne also uses successive gestural flourishes. There are three separate gestural flourishes that are associated with the three sets of stage directions (m. 138, Figure 51). Miriam's actions are highlighted with a distinct flourish in the piano.

Figure 51: Gestural Flourishes in Succession



The punch line of the Anticipation occurs when Miriam, in her frustration, tears out the pages of her manuscript and dramatically throws them in the air (mm. 143-144). This dramatic gesture is highlighted by the piano playing a dense, *sffz* cluster chord (Figure 52).

Figure 52: Cluster Chords

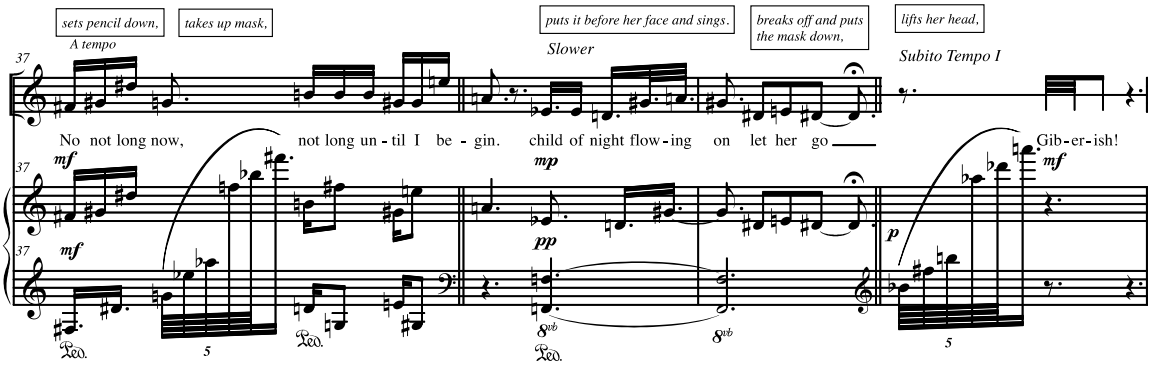


Varied Vocal Treatments

While Osborne utilized three different vocal treatments in *Winnie*—rhythmically notated text, normal speech, and melodically notated text—he only utilizes rhythmically notated text and melodically notated text in *Miriam: The Chair.* The most plausible

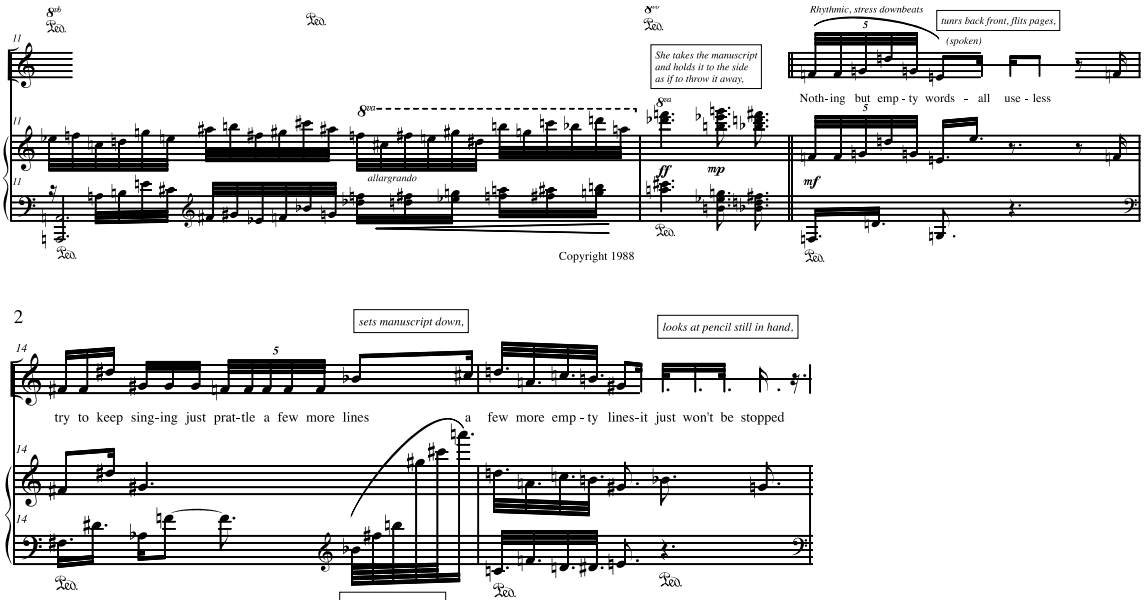
reason for this is that Miriam does not perform any extended monologues in *Miriam: The Chair*. Osborne's alternating use of rhythmically notated text and melodically notated text allows Miriam to comment on her situation with an added sense of realness. Miriam often performs her music theater piece aloud, sung to the "Singing to Herself" melody. After singing a short fragment, she often comments, in a rhythmically notated text, her frustration with the performance. For example, Miriam sings (mm. 38-40) only to comment, "Gibberish!" (Figure 53)

Figure 53: Varied Vocal Treatments



Miriam also reveals her feelings about her creative work when she sings in the "Empty Words" style, which is also interspersed with rhythmically notated text (Figure 54). Osborne's technique of occasionally adding rhythmically notated text allows for more expression in the actress's voice, for the "Empty Words" melody in measure 13 is cheerful sounding, but when it is broken up with rhythmically notated text, Miriam's true frustrations with herself are revealed.

Figure 54: Varied Vocal Treatments

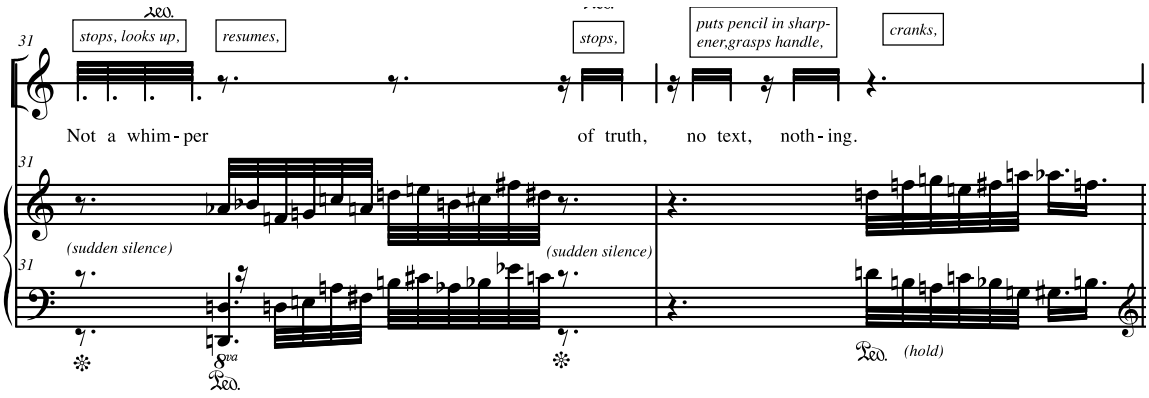


Use of Silence and Space

Osborne utilizes more instances of silence and space in *Miriam: The Chair* than he previously did in *Winnie.* This is a direct result of the differences between the protagonists Winnie and Miriam. Winnie is an incessant talker, always searching for ways to occupy her day and to fulfill her need to communicate with others; therefore, Osborne's adaptation of *Winnie* reflected that character trait in the music. Miriam is different, though. She spends a lot of her time searching for the right words to express herself. She spends time thinking and writing, often speaking in short clauses, as if she is composing her words as she is speaking. Miriam's serious nature allows for more reflection, so Osborne's music for *Miriam: The Chair* utilizes more silence and space. Osborne creates the effect of silence and space by using both extended periods of silence as well small breaks in text or accompaniment, creating a thinner texture, to allow for moments of reflection (Figure 55). Miriam's rhythmically notated text is fragmented, and

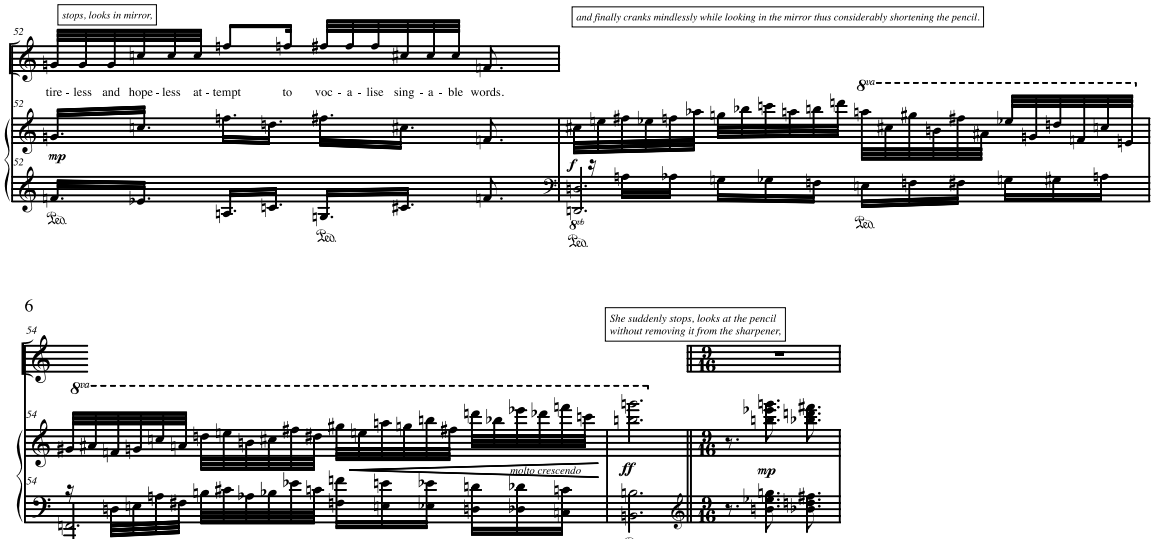
during her rests, the piano interjects with fragmented forms of "Writing Music." These sudden breaks in "Writing Music" with Miriam's text mirror her stark and "empty" words, for she says, "Not a whimper—of truth, no text, nothing." This variance in texture allows Miriam to reflect during her rests and for her text to be clearly heard during accompaniment rests.

Figure 55: Space for Reflection



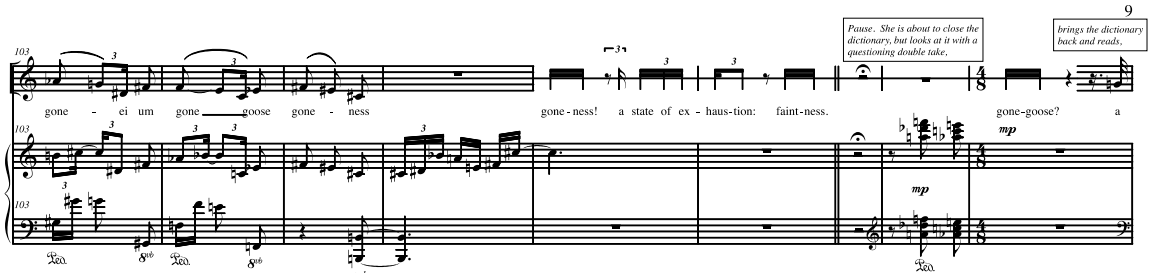
Osborne's other variances in texture often occur when Miriam is taking time to perform specific actions. Though Miriam silently performs her tasks, the piano accompanies her (mm. 53-54, Figure 56).

Figure 56: Varied Texture, Piano Accompanies Tasks



Osborne also uses silence in a directly as a way of letting dramatic events clear the air. Miriam tosses several pages from her manuscript on the floor, and the piano accents her dramatic gesture with a flourish, followed by a measure of rest accompanied by a *fermata* (mm. 82-84). Osborne uses this same technique in the B section of the Anticipation as she reads aloud from the dictionary (Figure 57). In this example, the piano accompaniment has rests (mm. 107-108) as Miriam reads, "Goneness! A state of exhaustion: faintness." Her statement is followed by an extended measure of rest in the voice and the piano. This allowance for silence and space reflect the words that Miriam reads as a text painting tool.

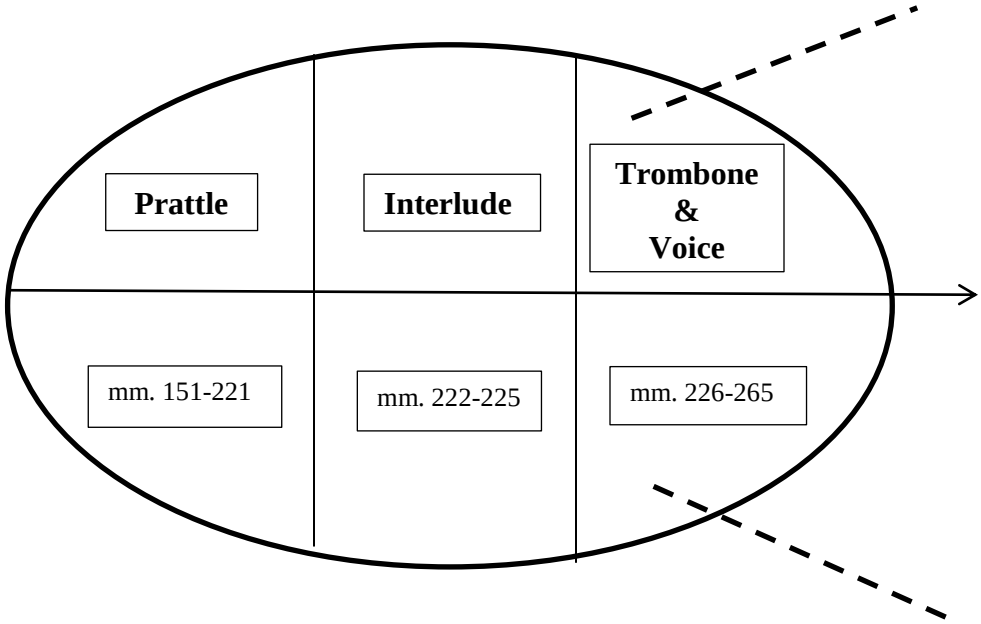
Figure 57: Silence



Summary of the Anticipation

Osborne establishes the Anticipation section of *Miriam: The Chair* by introducing different themes and motifs, alternating between rhythmically notated text and melodically notated text, composing gestural flourishes in the piano that highlight Miriam's actions, and integrating brief moments of silence and space. Miriam's sense of frustration with her situation is made obvious by her comments regarding her attempts at composing a music theater piece: "All useless! Nothing but empty words. In search of a useable text, a tireless and hopeless attempt to vocalize sing-able words." Her frustrations grow as she scribbles in her manuscript and sharpens her pencil, escalating to the point when she rips the pages of her manuscript out and scatters them across the floor. The Anticipation comes to an end as Miriam contemplates the scattered pages and makes an attempt to tidy her desk.

Figure 58: A.E.R. Graph: *Miriam: The Chair*—Event



Synopsis of the Event: Prattle and Interlude

Miriam reveals a great deal to the audience during the Prattle section of the Event. Osborne does not indicate any stage directions for Miriam, and the emphasis is placed on her words, which grow angrier and angrier. Miriam makes the painful realization that the words she has written will never make it to the stage—she will never perform her work for her children. She exclaims that she only wanted to perform her music theater piece for her children to make the inevitable silence less awkward when they visit. Miriam realizes that her family would prefer that she just follow the rules; they would prefer that she "warble some dead tune into the ground" (mm. 169-169) as opposed to actually expressing herself as a creative artist. Miriam's anger grows as she realizes her family just wants to see her with a smile on her face, albeit fake, singing a meaningless, happy tune. The Interlude section is very short—only three measures. Miriam trails off into the

next section proposing, "Maybe a melodrama." She believes that her family would find a melodrama interesting, so she makes one up on the spot. Her melodrama is encapsulated in the Trombone and Voice section.

Compositional Devices Utilized in the Prattle and Interlude

Text

The Prattle section is the main formal section where text is emphasized more than dramatic gestures. Osborne does not indicate any stage directions or utilize previously heard melodies, so an understanding of the text is essential for a deeper understanding of Miriam's character. The author has extracted Miriam's entire text from the Prattle section:

> These tedious broken words will never make the stage.
> Not that they would like to hear me speak,
> but all these frenzied words,
> these empty, frenzied words,
> wouldn't their patter help them to lighten up
> I mean lighten the lull that bothers them when you're mute?
> But this is not what I ought to sing.
> It's clear that they would prefer that I follow the rules,
> that I warble some dead tune into the ground,
> not a thought of who I am,
> hardly a moment to be myself,
> just the twittering of a happy woman.
>
> So shall I pour out a river of words
> that will flood over them with their charm?
> I mean something that titillates,
> not a thought with connotations,
> not a thought that has a bite,
> but a word to entertain.
>
> Certainly prattling amuses,
> even when forbidden to speak,
> so warble away a row of cheery tones,
> nothing offensive to ears polite,
> with a cascando of happy notes,
> and your cordially smiling face.

But there are days when hardly a word appears,
barely a tone,
nothing at all,
nothing to set me free,
not even a sigh to help me breathe,
just a stubborn hush.

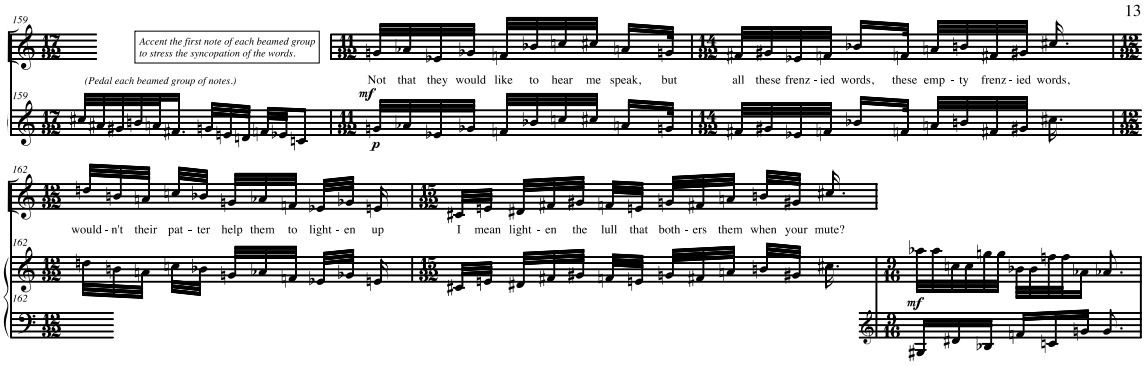
So what if I sing anything that comes into my head,
prattling on just to keep up the rhythmical flow,
while they rummage about in their cultured souls
pondering what it means.
Then maybe they'll shatter the silence with gracious applause,
probably thinking your stuttering babble was clever.
They'll leave there imagining you are alive,
to say nothing of your fascinating body.

Imagine that!
All those imagined intellectuals,
all those imagined artists.
You know, all those imagined moments,
when a woman gnaws off…
gnaws off,
her…tongue.[74]

An actual textual analysis will prove useful when discussing the feminist themes, and the author will address that topic later in a later section. Similar to *Winnie,* the text of the Prattle section in *Miriam: The Chair* is rhythmically driven. Osborne achieves this by utilizing consistent, flowing rhythms of running thirty-second notes. He also uses a different pitch for each syllable of text. Osborne divides Miriam's text into short, poetic lines, and the melody she sings is doubled by the piano, making for easier execution. The rhythmic nature of Miriam's words is also achieved by the voice inflection that Osborne indicates with his stage direction in measure 159: "Accent the first note of each beamed group to stress the syncopation of the words" (Figure 59).

[74] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 151-221.

Figure 59: Rhythmic Prattle

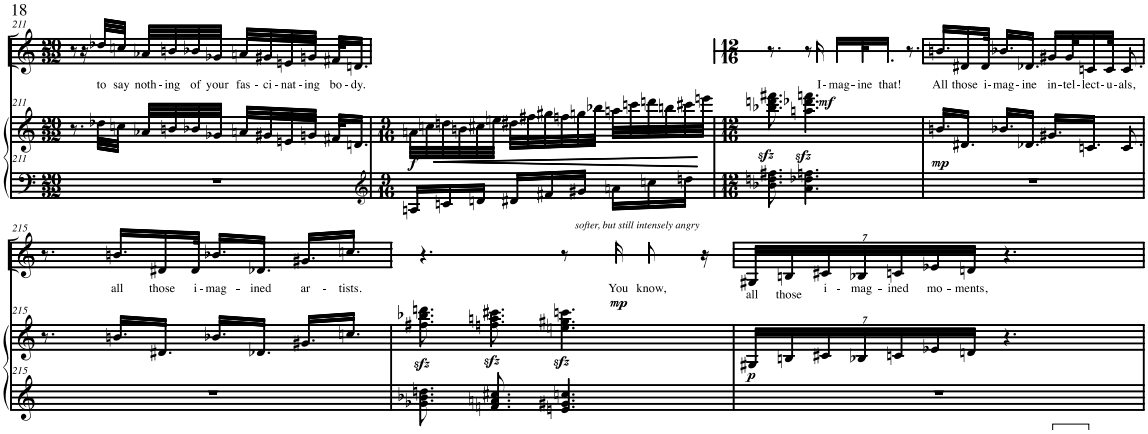


While the Anticipation section is highly dependent on melody and motivic usage, the Prattle focuses on the rhythmic nature of Miriam's words.

Varied Motifs

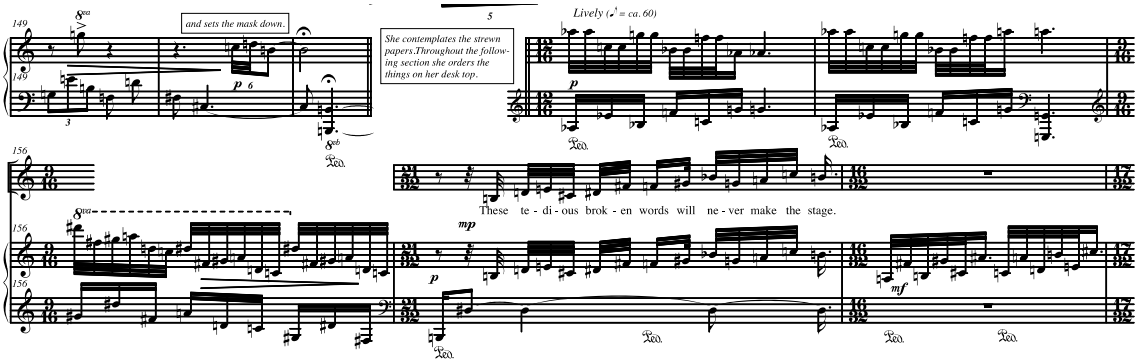
Osborne does not use any previously used motifs in the Prattle section except "Augmented Punches," which he uses more as Miriam's anger builds (Figure 60, mm. 213 and 216).

Figure 60: "Augmented Punches"



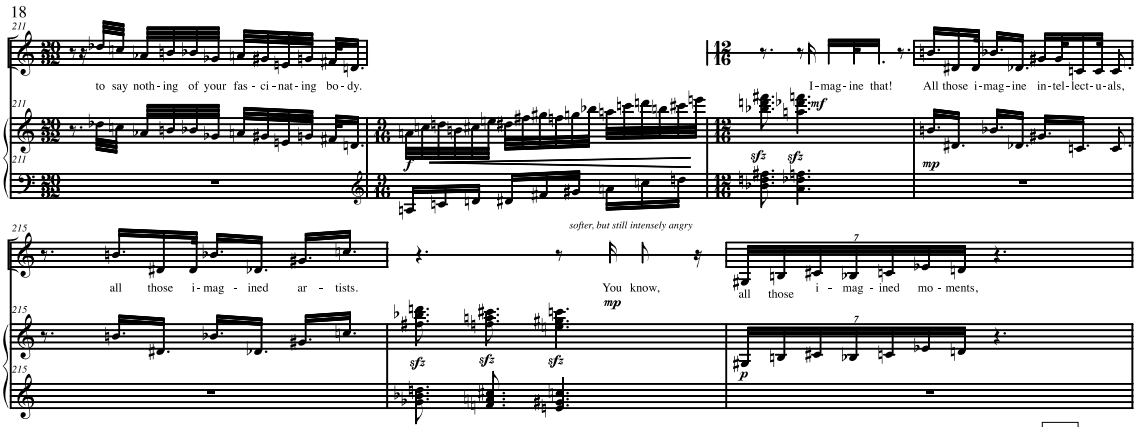
Osborne introduces a new motif in the Prattle section, which is played by the right hand of the piano as the section begins. The author will refer to this motif as "Contemplative Music" because as the motif is played in the piano, the stage directions indicate: "She [Miriam] contemplates the strewn papers. Throughout the following section she orders the things on her desk top" (p. 12). Melodically, "Contemplative Music" resembles the "Double Leap Motif" that is used in *Winnie,* but Osborne uses this motif more subtly and "contemplatively" in this particular work (Figure 61).

Figure 61: "Contemplative Music"



Miriam's lines of text are interwoven with brief piano interjections such as "Contemplative Music." As the tension builds and Miriam's anger rises, Osborne uses this motif more aggressively. For example, a slightly altered version of "Contemplative Music" is transferred from the piano to Miriam's melody (Figure 62, mm. 214-215).

Figure 62: "Contemplative Music" and "Augmented Punches"



Summary of Event: Prattle and Interlude

Osborne places a heavy emphasis on text in the Prattle section. He achieves this by highlighting the natural rhythms of the text and setting the text syllabically. Osborne does not use previously heard motifs except "Augmented Punches," which he uses to build intensity and to project Miriam's ensuing anger. Osborne utilizes a new motif: "Contemplative Music" in the piano interjections between Miriam's lines of text and later in Miriam's melody to support the building drama.

Synopsis of the Event: Trombone and Voice

The Interlude is extremely short—only allowing enough time for Miriam to rotate her desk to the side, propose that she sing a melodrama, and pick up her instrument. The Trombone and Voice section begins immediately when Miriam commences her melodramatic story saying, "She was once a mother, but then came that day" (m. 226). Miriam proceeds to alternate between storytelling and playing trombone interjections, which eventually lead to the first cathartic climax where Miriam screams the last note of

her melody through her instrument, amplifying the note to a dramatic *fff* dynamic. The author has extracted Miriam's "melodrama" from the music:

> She was once a mother,
> but then came that day.
> Father gone away.
> Mother left to care for all.
> She was buried in her song.
>
> Then the neighbor came and knocked,
> knocked at the door,
> but she played on to the end.
> He says, "You have left the water running,
> running through the floor."
> But she couldn't stop,
> the music held her fast.
>
> She kept on,
> singing louder,
> with the neighbors there,
> neighbors running through the door,
> water running through the floor.
>
> Is Anna coming?
> Where is Anna?
> Flashing lights packing singing her away.
> ANNA!
> Where is Anna?[75]

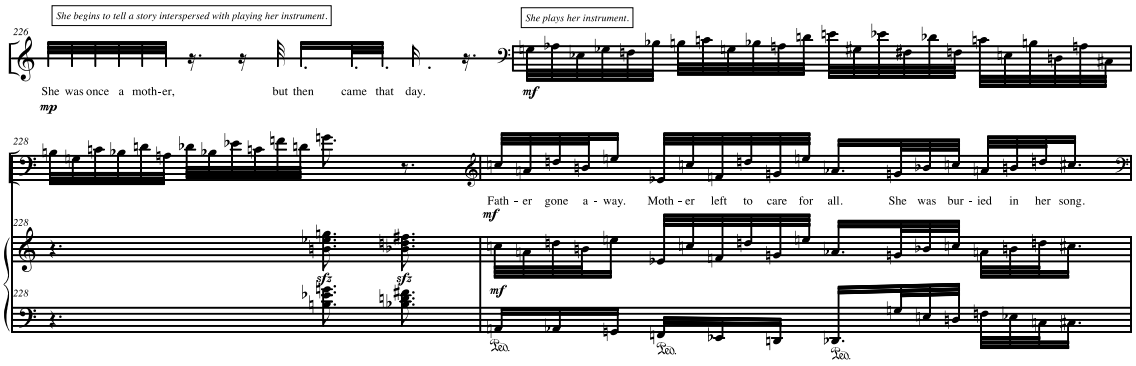
Compositional Devices Utilized in Trombone and Voice

Varied Vocal Treatment

Osborne treats Miriam's text in the Trombone and Voice section similarly as he did in the Prattle. He alternates between melodically notated text that resembles the Prattle—one note per syllable, constant rhythms, meandering up and down, etc.—and rhythmically notated text (Figure 63, mm. 226 and 229).

[75] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 226-265.

Figure 63: Varied Vocal Treatment

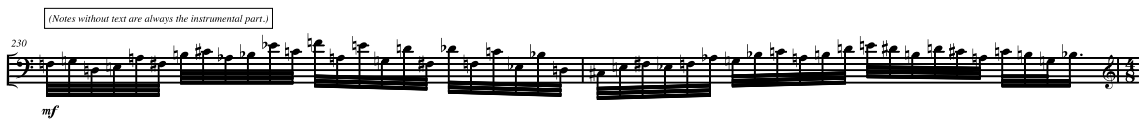


As the energy and drama build, Osborne indicates that Miriam should deliver the rhythmically notated text. For example, the stage directions indicate: "She begins entering her story with increasing urgency" (m. 232). Additionally, the stage directions indicate: "She becomes fully immersed in the terrors of her story" (m. 248).

Motifs that Build Intensity

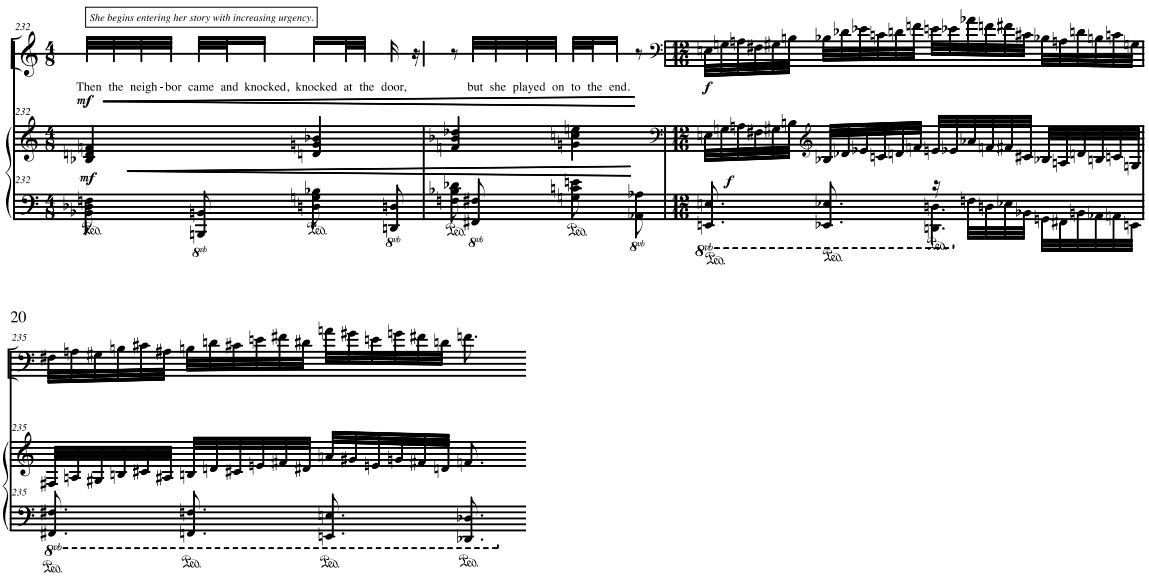
Again, Osborne does not utilize the previously heard motifs from the Anticipation except for "Augmented Punches." Osborne uses similar motifs in the Trombone and Voice section that he did in the same section in *Winnie.* For example, the first motif that Osborne introduces is played by Miriam on the trombone, and it will be referred to by the author as "Running Interjection." Melodically, "Running Interjection" resembles the melody that Miriam also sings (Figure 64, mm. 230-231).

Figure 64: "Running Interjection"



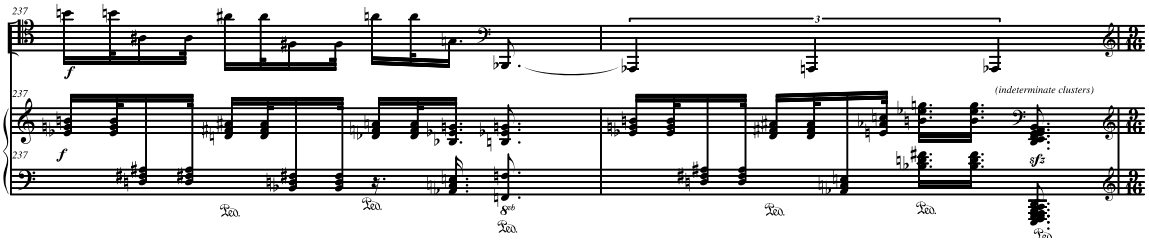
Osborne builds the intensity with each passing interjection of voice and trombone. For example, as the voice crescendos (mm. 232-233), the trombone picks up with a *forte* "Running Interjection" (mm. 234-235), ending the interjection in a higher range than before (Figure 65).

Figure 65: "Running Interjection" Builds Intensity



Another motif that Osborne uses as a trombone interjection that adds variety and builds intensity will be referred to by the author as "Double Leap + Pedals" (Figure 66). The piano doubles this motif and punctuates the end of the motif with a *sforzando* indeterminate cluster chord. The drama that ensues results from the pairing of extreme ranges—the upper range and the pedal range.

Figure 66: "Double Leap + Pedals" Trombone Motif



Just as he did in *Winnie,* Osborne builds to the climax of the Event section by making the vocal interjections shorter and the trombone lines longer and more exuberant (Figure 67). The last line of text in the Trombone and Voice section occurs in measure 250. After that, Osborne places one trombone interjection after another. He begins with "Running Interjection" (mm. 251-252), followed by "Double Leap + Pedal" (mm. 253-254). After a brief measure of rest, the trombone continues with "Running Interjection" (m. 256), followed by "Double Leap + Pedal" (m. 258). Osborne then introduces a fanfare melody (m. 260), followed by an extended "Running Interjection" (mm. 261-262). Osborne builds the intensity even more by composing a fanfare melody paired with dramatic glissandi (mm. 263-264). After building the intensity to a breaking point, the climax occurs in (m. 265) when Miriam screams a long, high B through her trombone, which is amplified to a *fff* dynamic. The piano heightens the intensity of the climax by pounding repeated C-minor chords, followed by descending augmented chords.

Figure 67: Trombone Building to Climax

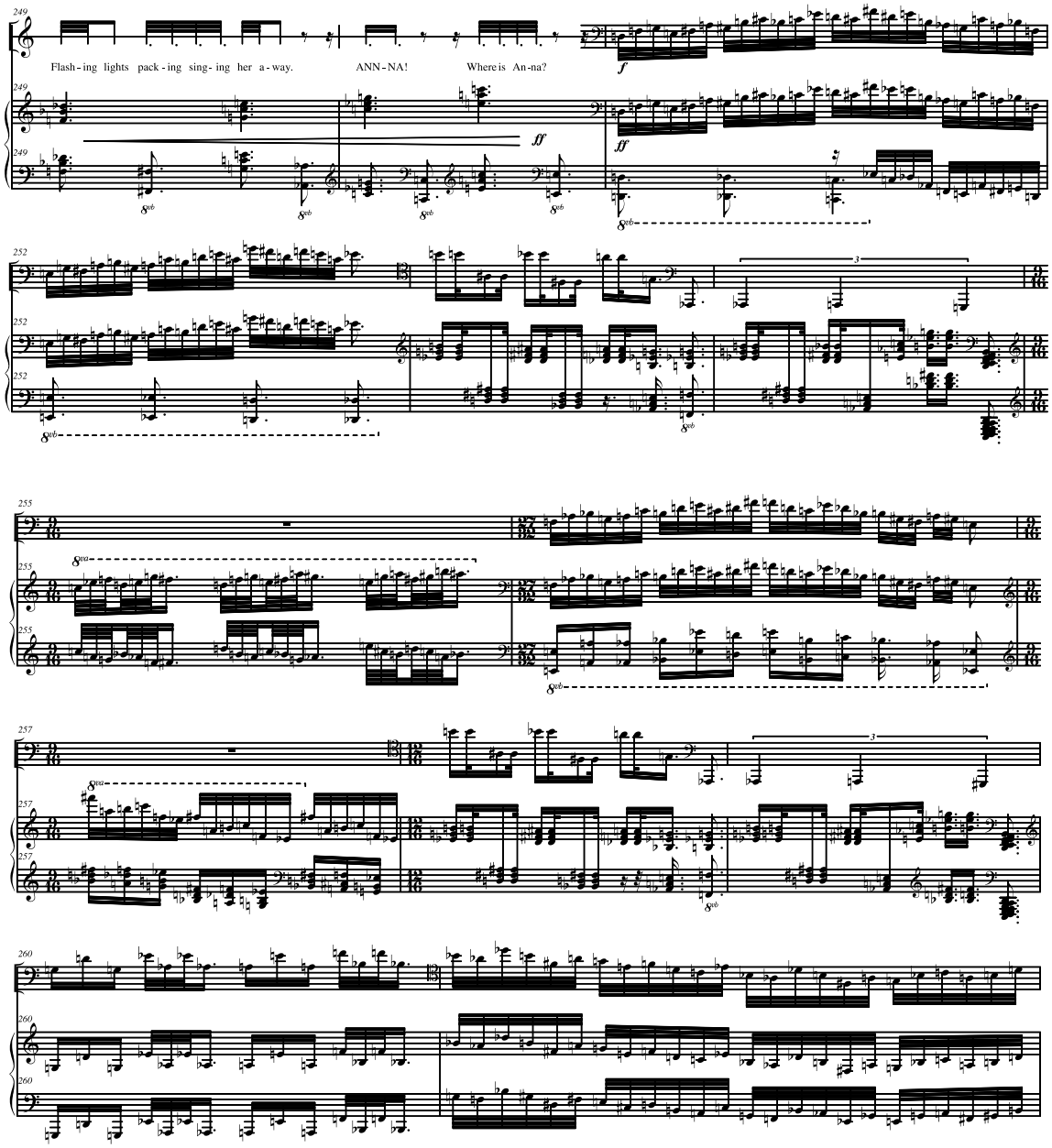
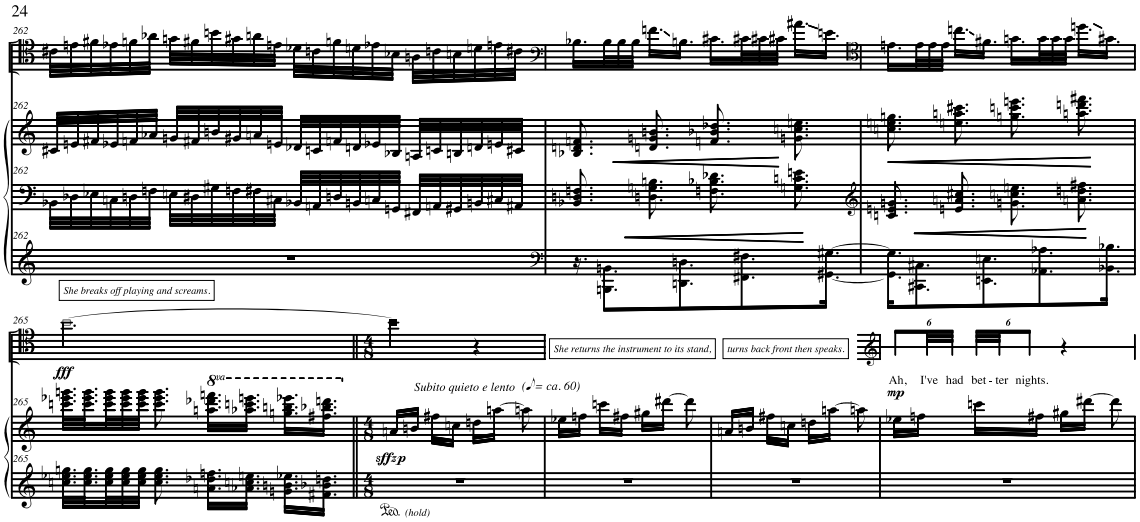


Figure 67: Continued



A photo of Abbie Conant performing the Trombone and Voice section of *Miriam: The Chair* can be seen in Figure 68 on the next page.

Figure 68: Conant Performs *Miriam: The Chair*[76]

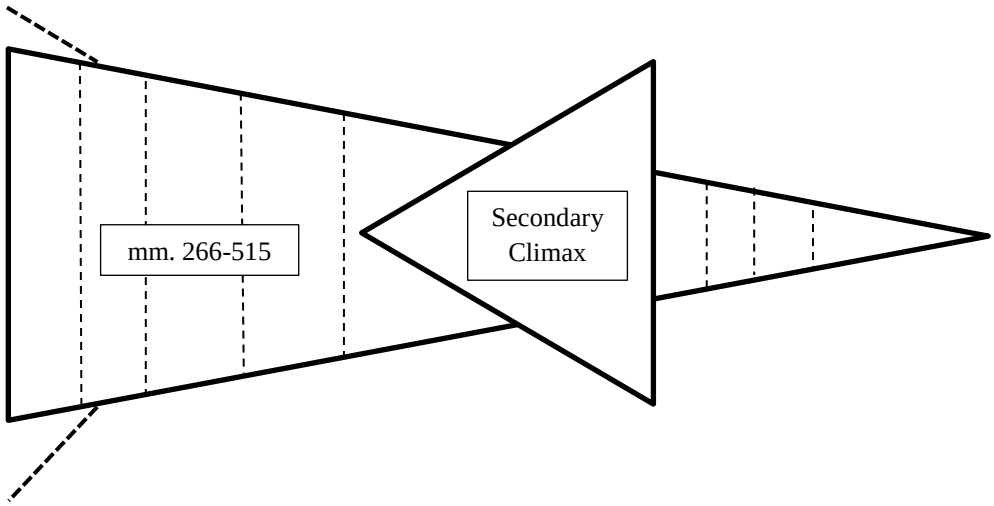
Summary of Event: Trombone and Voice

As Miriam tells her terrifying melodrama, she interjects by playing short motifs on her trombone, mainly "Running Interjection" and "Double Leap + Pedal" motifs. As her story gets more intense, her trombone interjections do as well. Once Miriam finishes her story, she continues playing her trombone more exuberantly. Osborne builds the intensity further by pairing motifs one after another. Osborne creates the climax of the

[76] Abbie Conant, from http://www.osborne-conant.org/Miriam-upward.jpg (accessed May 2013).

work by composing in the extreme registers of the trombone and adding dramatic glissandi, followed by Miriam's terrifying scream through her trombone.

Figure 69: A.E.R. Graph: *Miriam: The Chair*—Reflection



Synopsis of the Reflection

During the Reflection (Figure 69), Miriam experiences a vast array of emotions from extreme anger and suffocating despair to peace and hope. Since the Reflection is a succession of theatrical beats, Miriam experiences the different emotions as she progresses through a series of small theatrical events, eventually leading to a second climax. As the drama from the previous section settles, Miriam succumbs to how she is "supposed to act." She says:

> Ah, I've had better nights.
> But when it's possible to sing all your words,
> you need say nothing.
> Oh one sentence might have a point,
> but silence is the best.[77]

[77] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 269-273.

Miriam reflects on the truth that she has something to say and express—she has a song to sing, even if she is wearing a "mask."

> But still, if the day comes
> you say a few words that seem like your own,
> will they be a bit...fake?
> Can it be true that you have some words,
> good words,
> singable words?
>
> *sings*
> Played out to all of those looking at me,
> a woman and her voice in useless effort,
> a mask playing to masks.[78]

Deciding she wants to write, Miriam searches for a piece of paper but finds none, so she proceeds to write on her palms. She writes so obsessively and vigorously that her palms bleed when she finishes.

> One cannot believe there are so many words.
> If I don't write,
> I can only sit here and look at my bindings.
> Yes, that's what I always say,
> but then what isn't always said?
> I must keep my pencil dull
> or my skin is cut away to the flesh.
> More words and more words,
> but not a song to sing.[79]

Miriam physically harms herself searching for the right words to write, and then two wrist clamps on her chair close, locking her in place, but Miriam is not easily shaken. Osborne's stage directions indicate: "She holds her gaze forward unaltered" (m. 323). Miriam is in a daze as she sings about her situation:

> Sometimes it's horrifying being solid.
> And yet it's difficult to think of…
> of not being here at all.

---

[78] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 274-288.

[79] Ibid., mm. 298-316.

So I'll stay in my chair.
Everyone probably feels a little clamped in.
But it should be very relaxing
to be locked in my chair with all my things here.
They say I'm in my own place.[80]

Miriam then sings a story. While it is unclear who exactly the story is about, there are so many specific details, leading to an inference that the story is about Miriam. This foggy recollection describes a woman giving birth and then having a hysterectomy.

Will they listen if I tell my story?
The common story.
The birth.
The cesarean night in the clinic.
The abdomen cut,
the birth cord cut,
the first embrace,
and the stilling breast.
The squeaks of the gum sole shoes
when they wheel in someone new,
the clinks of the apparatus.
The double steel doors,
the hysterectomy.
Then they took her home.[81]

At this point in Miriam's story, allusions can be drawn back to the Trombone and Voice section, when she sang her melodrama.

The older children had hardly departed when she rose,
started the water…slipped…
slipped off her night gown,
started the water for a long bath,
let the water flood the floor below,
heard the doorbell ringing…
huddled…huddled…naked…
naked on the floor.[82]

---

[80] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 328-341.

[81] Ibid., mm. 346-360.

[82] Ibid., mm. 363-370.

Miriam's concept of what is real and what is made up is slightly blurred. She has begun to lose the ability to decipher what are her own memories and what are her creative fabrications. Miriam asks, "But what if she's not imagined? I mean not imagining herself to be. And what if she were real?" (mm. 384-390). This question reveals that there is probably a lot of truth in her stories, and the events in her stories are most likely what caused her to be sent to the asylum.

> The night is getting late.
> And there is a strange danger here.
> Too much fantasy.
> That's the obvious danger
> But what if she's not imagined?
> I mean, not imagining herself to be.
> And what if she were real?
> Why then she should just close her eyes
> and keep on singing.[83]

As if breaking out of her fantasy, she snaps back to her current situation and comments about how unhappy she is in the asylum. She grows upset realizing that her visitors will soon arrive and she has lost her voice. Miriam alternates between her comments and practicing vocal exercises to get her voice back.

> It's so cold in this house
> I shiver constantly.
> [*sings*]
> The weekend is here,
> and my voice is dead!
> [*sings*]
> And this time I get a visit.
> [*sings*]
> I'll ask them for some thermal underwear
> [*sings*]
> if I can speak at all.
> [*sings*]
> I'll try to keep myself in voice.
> [*sings*]

---

[83] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 376-395.

I'm ready for them!
[*sings*]
And if I can't sing,
if I can't speak a word?
[*sings*]
I'll start aping things.
[*sings*]
Just like this.
[*mimics singing*]
I won't sound like a…
[*mimics singing*]
like a mad woman.
[*mimics singing*][84]

Miriam's anger grows as she embraces her "madwoman" persona. She reaches her breaking point, and the second climax, when she angrily mouths the words, "I love you" over and over.

No, stay in your chair as silent as possible.
I can't say how happy I am.
I tell them how happy.
I tell them how I feel.
I say, "I love you"
[*angrily mouths words*: I love you!]
I force them to listen
[I love you!]
[I love you!]
[I love you!]
[I love you!]
[I love you!][85]

The emotional energy that Miriam spends drains her completely. Osborne's stage directions indicate that she is "suddenly still" (m. 428). After taking a moment to compose herself, Miriam finishes her story about the woman who nearly drowned herself in the bathtub. She speaks in a quiet monotone:

Suddenly the door flew open
and they all ran in

[84] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 399-413.

[85] Ibid., mm. 414-427.

and up she jumped
and up screaming Annie!
And asking and asking ANNIE! ANNIE!
While they all ran about looking for the spigot,
the police in all their paraphernalia
the super, Mister Clemons,
all running about for the spigot,
Mathew and Mary and old Lady Hestand
all running about
watching her naked poisoned,
poisoned.[86]

After a long pause, Miriam plays a lyrical trombone solo marked *Cantabile; sempre legato; lo stesso tempo* that is reminiscent of the melody that she sang during the B section of the Anticipation. Once she finishes her trombone solo, Miriam sings one last song. This time her song reveals a resounding sense of hope—hope that she will one day find the words that she has been searching for. Miriam sings somberly:

The night.
The lighthouse, the swelling sea.
The arched back.
The conception.
No. Only night.
The moon upon the sand.
Only sand.

long pause

Sing.
Sing angry cries.
I'll find the words.
I'll find something.
Words.[87]

Miriam puts the mask before her face, but she can only remain silent. As if transfixed, she slowly removes the mask, keeping her gaze forward. As the light dims, she brings back her mask once more, and then the lights fade to black.

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[86] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair*, mm. 432-439.

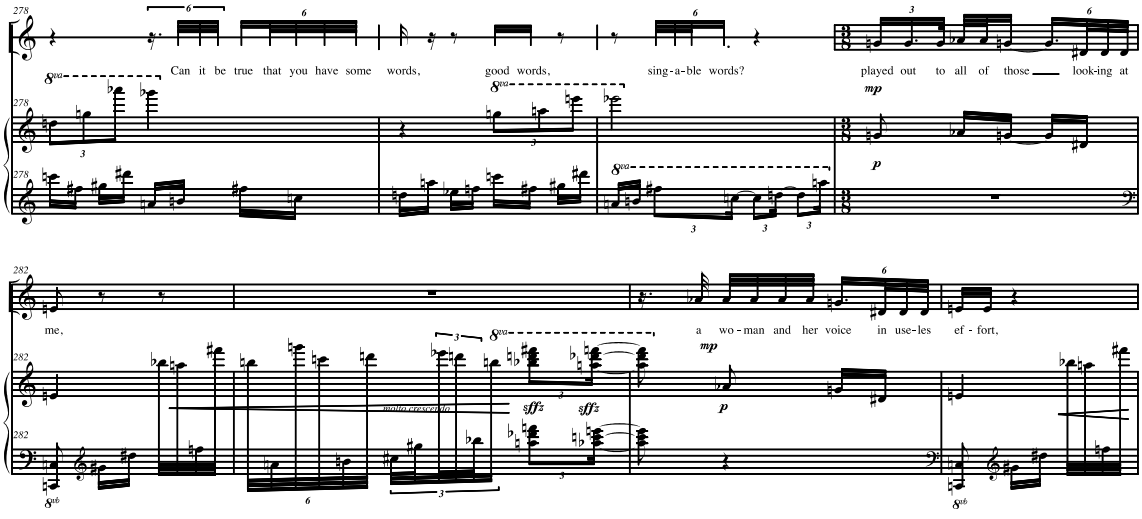
[87] Ibid., mm. 489-503.

Compositional Devices Utilized in the Reflection

Alternating Vocal Treatments

Osborne uses a variety of vocal treatments during the Reflection. The Reflection occurs directly after the first climax in the Event, and Osborne evokes a stark contrast by using rhythmically notated text. The rhythmically notated text helps to portray Miriam's emotional exhaustion (Figure 70). The first instance that Osborne uses melodically notated text in the Reflection is a direct reflection of the meaning of the text. For example, Miriam says, "Can it be true that you have some words, good words, singable words?" (mm. 278-280) She answers herself by singing in a quasi-recitative style in measures 281-288, "Played out to all of those looking at me, a woman and her voice in useless effort, a mask playing to masks" (mm. 281-288).

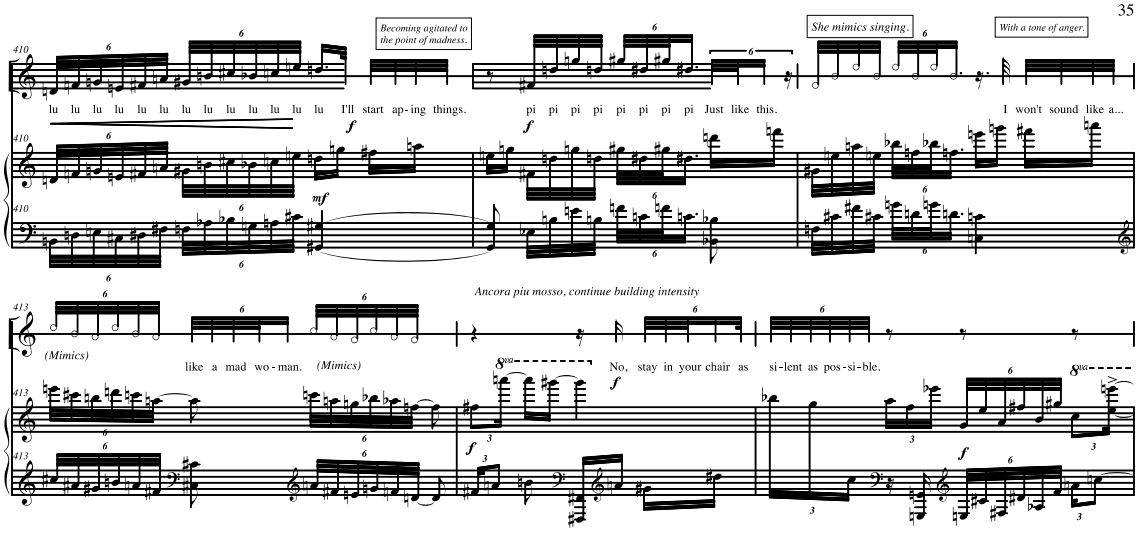
Figure 70: Alternating Vocal Style



Rhythmically notated text is also reserved for introducing new sub-sections. For example, Miriam asks, "Will they listen if I tell my story? The common story" (mm. 346-348). She then proceeds to sing in a similar quasi-recitative style.

The most frequent use of alternating vocal styles occurs as the drama builds to the second climax. Miriam says, "It's cold in this house—I shiver constantly" (m. 399). She then sings a vocal exercise to preserve her voice. This alternation continues to occur, and Miriam's anger increases. She says, "And what if I can't speak a word? *Vocal exercise.* I'll start aping things. *Vocal exercise.* Just like this. *She mimics singing*" (mm. 409-412). Miriam's mimicry is very effective because the piano plays the notes that she would normally sing for her vocal exercise. Miriam's mimicry reveals yet again how she must deny her true self and pretend to be someone that she is not—another mask (Figure 71).

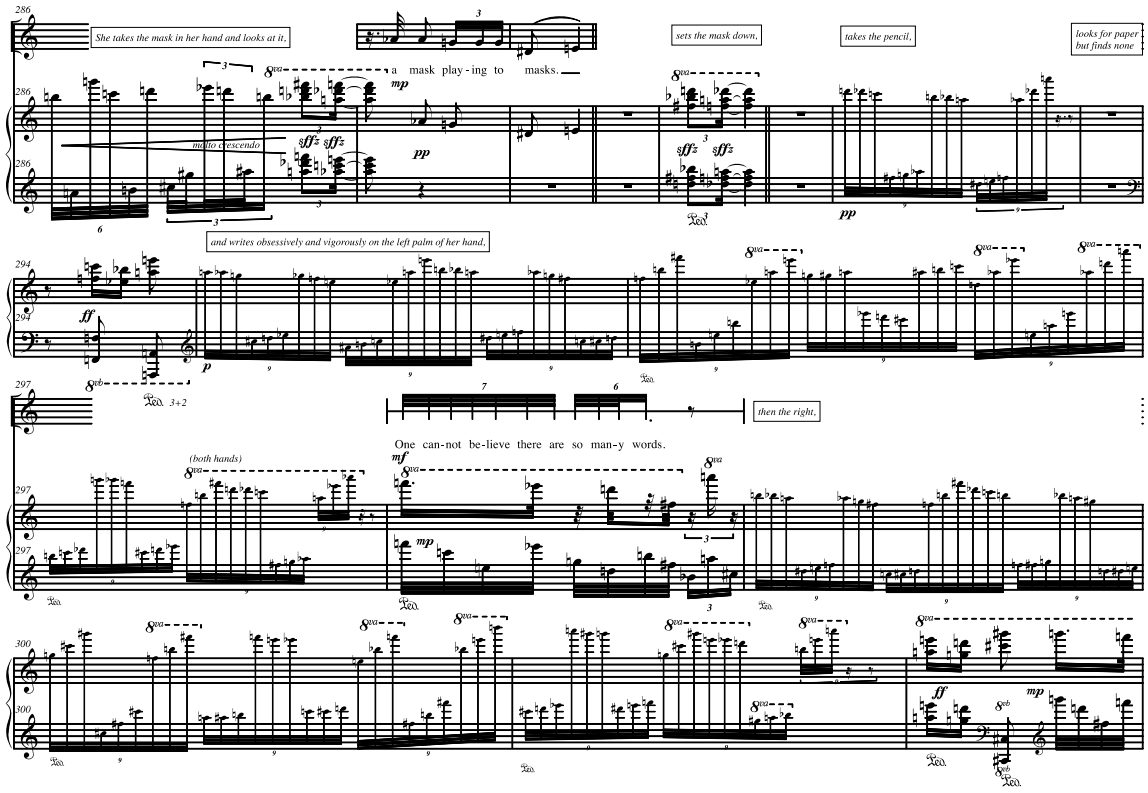
Figure 71: Miriam Mimics Singing



Varied Motifs

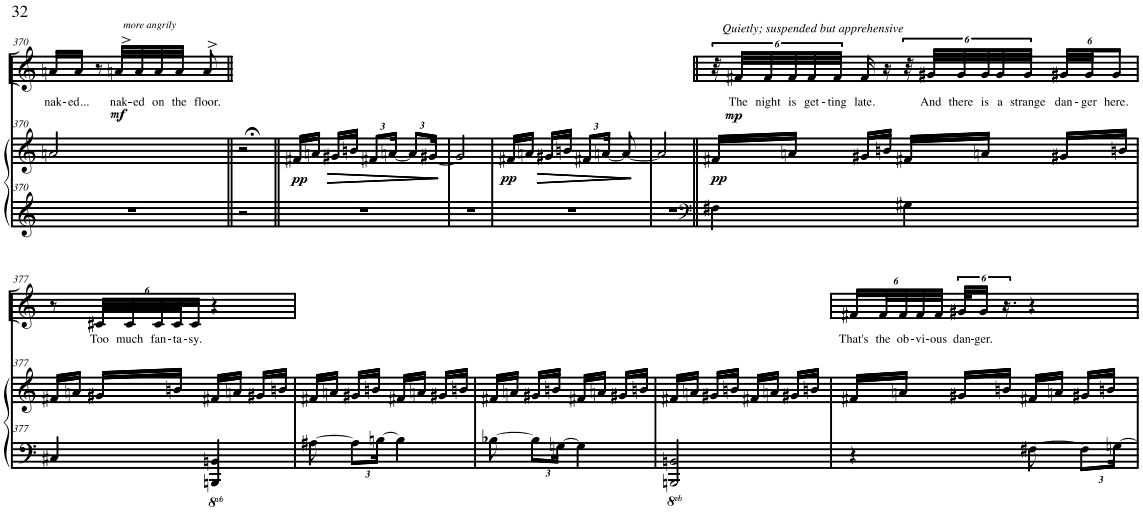
Osborne does not use recurring motifs in the Reflection except for "Augmented Punches." The first new motif that Osborne introduces is similar to "Writing Music" in that it sounds frenzied. The author will refer to this motif as "Palm Writing Music," for the piano plays a dizzying nine-note pattern while Miriam writes on the palms of her hands (Figure 72).

Figure 72: "Palm Writing Music"



The next new motif first occurs in measure 376 and will be referred to by the author as "Quiet Ostinato" (Figure 73). This ostinato is played at *pianissimo* by the piano and is a repeating four-note pattern: F#-A-G#-B.

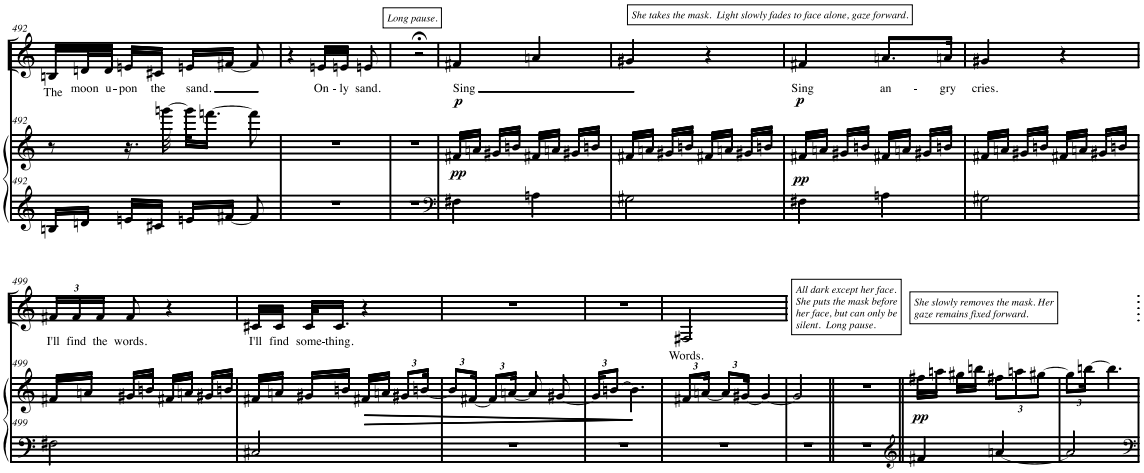
Figure 73: "Quiet Ostinato"



Osborne is able to steadily build intensity with this quiet motif by adding low octaves in the left hand of the piano (mm. 377 and 380). Osborne's minimalistic treatment of this motif adds a suspenseful mood to the unfolding drama.

Osborne also utilizes the "Quiet Ostinato" pitches in Miriam's last melody that she sings. Also doubled in the piano, but thrice as fast, there is a sense of cohesion and finality at the end of the work. Osborne utilizes different forms of "Quiet Ostinato" in both the voice and the piano as Miriam sings, "Sing. Sing angry cries. I'll find the words. I'll find something. Words" (Figure 74, mm. 495-504).

Figure 74: "Quiet Ostinato" in Piano and Voice



The last motif that Osborne utilizes is the familiar "Augmented Punches" motif. The most dramatic use of this motif works in conjunction with Miriam silently screaming, "I love you!" Miriam angrily mouths the words, "I love you" six times, and the piano plays "Augmented Punches," one punch for each syllable, with Miriam (Figure 75, mm. 420-427). "Augmented Punches" have previously been used to establish dramatic moments, and their use at the second climax is extremely effective—especially paired with Miriam's enraged silent screams (See Conant silently scream as Miriam in Figure 76).

Figure 75: "Augmented Punches" with Silent Screams of, "I love you!"

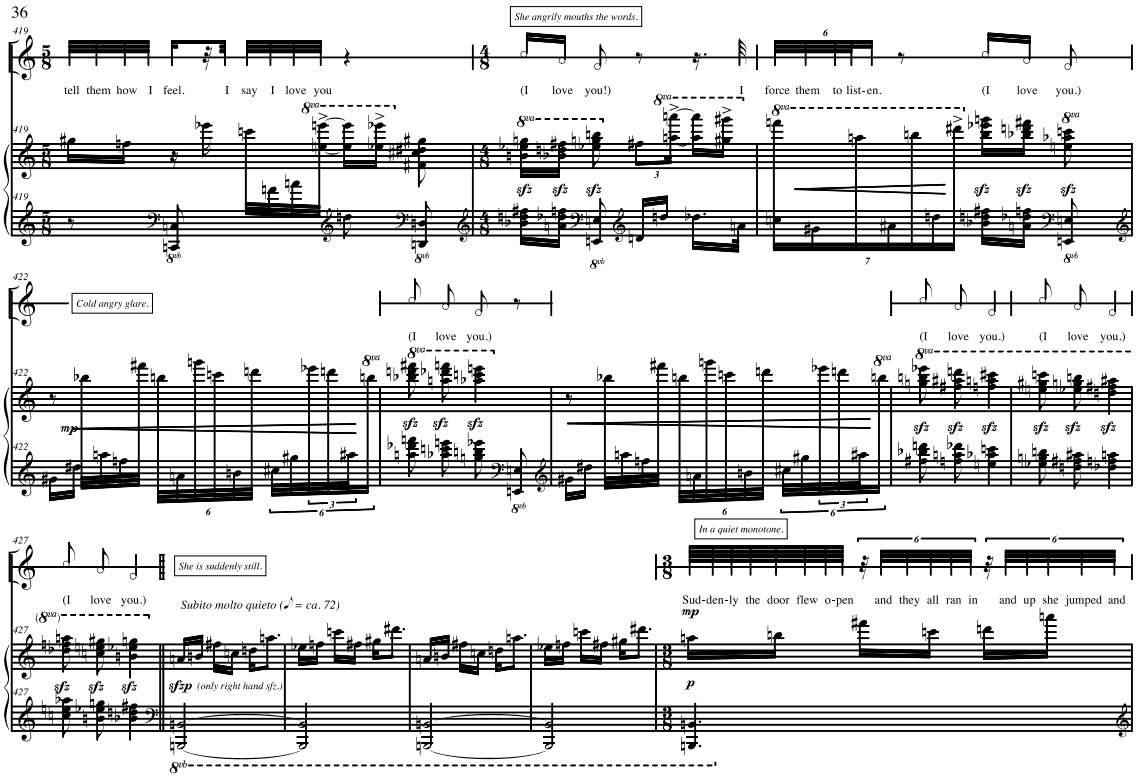


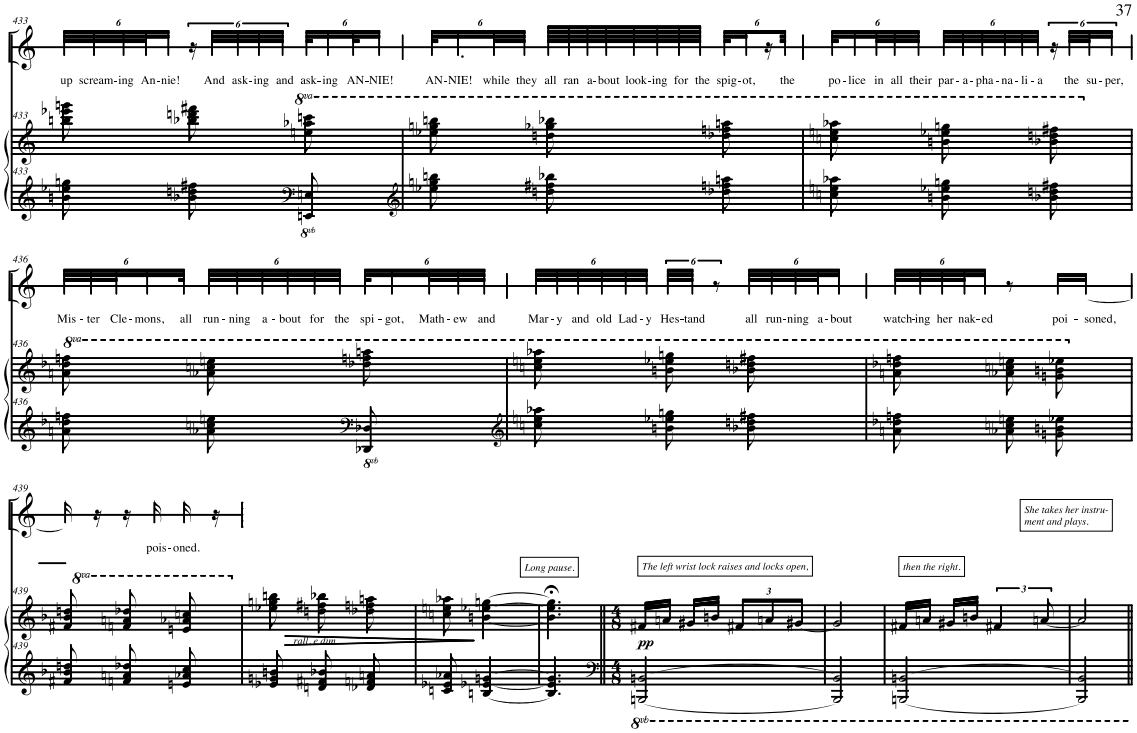
Figure 76: Abbie Conant's Silent Screams as Miriam[88]

Osborne also uses "Augmented Punches" in rapid succession as Miriam tells her last story in a quiet monotone. This time, however, Osborne does not assign a *sforzando*

[88] Abbie Conant, from http://www.osborne-conant.org/press-photos3/miriam1%20det.jpg (accessed May 2013).

articulation to the augmented chords. The "Augmented Punches" reflect the quiet nature of Miriam's voice. Intensity is still achieved, though, even without a loud dynamic. The continuous repetition of "Augmented Punches" creates unrelenting dramatic tension. Even after Miriam finishes her story, the piano continues to play "Augmented Punches" (Figure 77).

Figure 77: "Augmented Punches" Carry Intensity



Osborne also uses "Augmented Punches" periodically throughout Miriam's last lyrical trombone solo. Osborne marks the piano interjections of "Augmented Punches" as *subito violente* (Figure 78). These sudden spurts of "violence" do not affect Miriam's peaceful playing because she is completely absorbed in her musical expression (Figure 79).

Figure 78: "Augmented Punches" Against Lyrical Trombone Solo

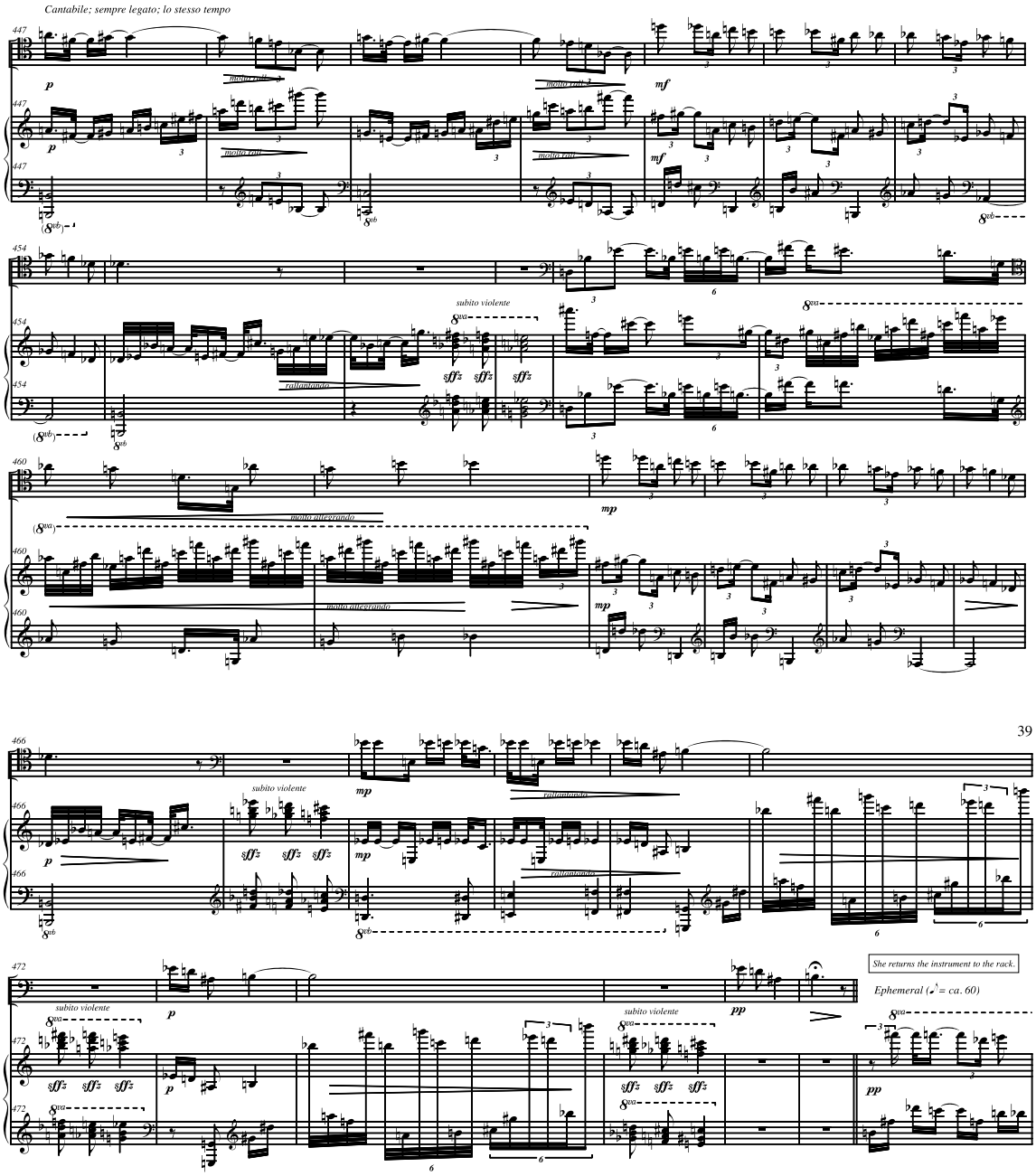


Figure 79: Abbie Conant Performs Miriam's Lyrical Trombone Solo[89]

[89] Abbie Conant, from http://www.osborne-conant.org/press-photos/Miriam3.jpg (accessed May 2013).

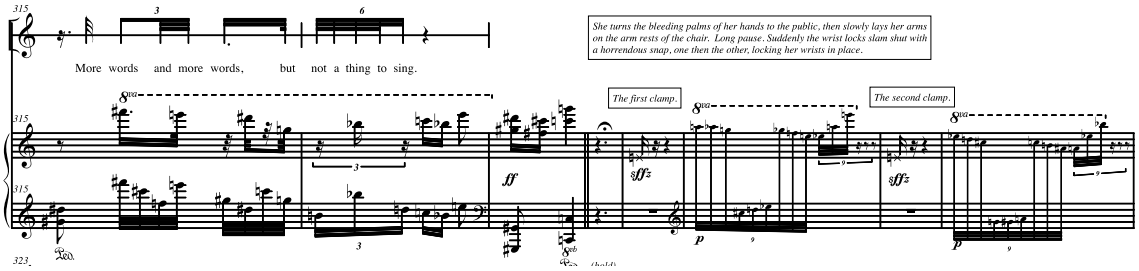
The last use of "Augmented Punches" occurs at the very end of the piece. At this point, the lights have already started to dim as Miriam removes the mask from her face. Suddenly, she puts the mask before her face again. As she does this, the piano plays "Augmented Punches" one last time, letting the audience know that though Miriam is resolved in finding the words she is looking for, she will revert back to the mask that she has always been accustomed to wearing.

Use of Silence and Space

Osborne's use of silence and space is more abundant in the Reflection than any other section. Osborne initially uses rhythmically notated text that is broken in small fragments in the Reflection. These fragments feature brief amounts of space that coordinate with the words of the text. For example, Miriam says, "But when it's possible to sing all your words, you need say nothing. Oh one sentence might have a point, but silence is best" (mm. 270-273). Osborne places short rests in Miriam's text after "you need say nothing" and "silence is best." Though subtle, these small breaks make Miriam's text more authentic.

Another important use of silence and space occurs when Miriam reveals her bloody palms to the audience (m. 318). Osborne places a *fermata* over a measure of rest for the voice and piano. The sudden silence makes Miriam's shocking display of self-mutilation dramatic. Osborne also uses silence when Miriam puts her bloody palms down, and the clamps close one by one over her wrists. The "horrendous snap," as Osborne describes in the stage directions, is all that is heard (Figure 80).

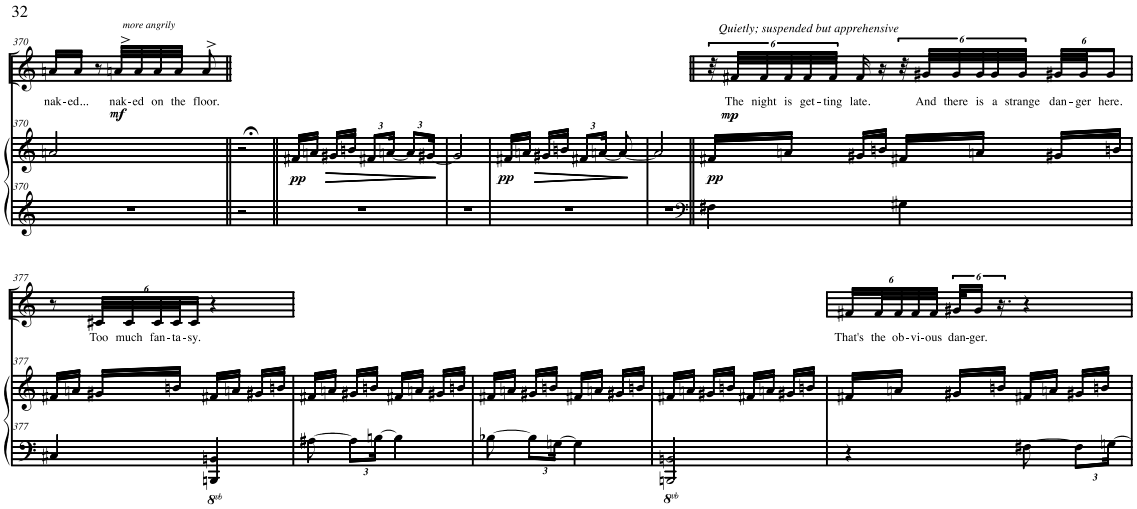
Figure 80: Percussive Wrist Clamps



Osborne also uses measured silence at the end of select sections in the Reflection. These silences usually occur after Miriam delivers a disturbing ending to one of her stories. For example, after Miriam sings, "naked…naked on the floor," there is a measure of silence, allowing the audience to reflect on her tragic words (m. 370). Similarly, after Miriam says, "watching her naked, poisoned, poisoned," the piano plays two sets of "Augmented Punches," followed by a long pause (mm. 438-439). The silence allows the horrific nature of Miriam's words to sink in.

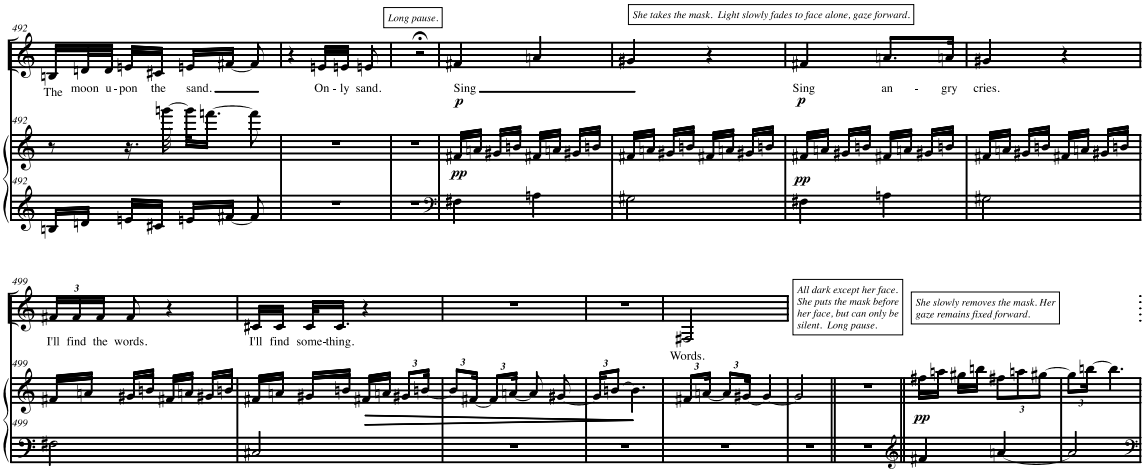
Osborne also achieves a sense of space by thinning out the texture and using simple motifs. Osborne makes extensive use of the "Quiet Ostinato" motif (m. 376). Coupled with spread out fragments of text, this underlying motif creates a reflective mood (Figure 81).

Figure 81: Thin Texture



Osborne continues using this same thin texture at the end of the work, incorporating more measured pauses (Figure 82).

Figure 82: Thin Texture and Measured Silence



Summary of the Reflection

Osborne establishes the Reflection section immediately after the first climax of the Event. Miriam experiences extreme emotions as she makes her way through the different theatrical beats. Osborne achieves a variety of textures, which outline the theatrical beats, by alternating between different vocal treatments, motifs, and compositional devices.

Miriam: The Chair and Feminist Themes

Beginnings and Premieres

Fundamentally, the *Miriam* trilogy is different from anything that Osborne had previously composed. As stated earlier, many of Osborne's Beckett productions did not contain feminist themes. In fact, Osborne believes that Beckett may have even been misogynistic since Winnie often makes fun of feminine ideals. Osborne says, "We just dove in and broke away from Beckett [by composing *Miriam*] and did something political that also addressed the most basic elements of consciousness."[90]

Feminist themes were on the minds of Osborne and Conant when they began collaborating together in 1987 on the creation of *Miriam* since Conant had already been in the Munich Philharmonic for six years. Conant's professional experience as a trombonist in the Munich Philharmonic is "the very essence of why the piece was created."[91] Conant describes the pain that she endured, which is reflected in the character Miriam:

> [I] was personally experiencing pure hatred because I was a feminine being. Just to experience that viscerally…I think a lot of women experience it at an

[90] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

[91] Ibid.

> unconscious level and they're constantly hiding it from themselves because it's so *painful* [italics added by author] to be hated because you're a woman. But it is *everywhere* [italics added by author] if you have eyes to see it. And I think that Bill is so unique because he got this—I mean, ever since I've known him, he has so gotten this…And at the time I didn't get it. I wasn't a feminist—I was a trombone player. I played the best, and I got the job, but then there was all of this other stuff. And it took many years before I realized it wasn't about me as a player, it was about me as a woman.[92]

When Osborne decided to compose a work that dealt with feminist ideas, he thought that his creative expression would be met with open minds. Unfortunately that was far from the case. Osborne and Conant recall their premiere of *Miriam: The Chair* in Germany:

> It was a huge revelation for us because we had premiered *Miriam: The Chair* in 1988 in Stuttgart, and we got heckled. It was an all-male audience, and it created this indelible memory in my brain. After Abbie's performance, they booed her. I had no idea that it was going to cause that kind of reaction because I still had this American-centric mentality that there would be a lot of support for a feminist impulse, and it just wasn't there.[93]

It was not until 1993, when Conant was invited to perform at the first International Women's Brass Conference in St. Louis, that she and Osborne finally received a positive reaction from an audience after a performance of *Miriam: The Chair*. After Conant's emotionally exhausting performance, the entire auditorium was completely silent. Conant recalls, "I thought that I had completely failed. I even started to cry as I was bowing because I thought that they just didn't get it. I was literally weeping."[94] Contrary to her beliefs, the IWBC audience did get it—they were stunned by Conant's captivating performance. Sylvia Alimena, conductor of the Eclipse Chamber

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[92] Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

[93] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

[94] Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

Orchestra and a horn player with the National Symphony in Washington, D.C. was at Conant's IWBC performance and remembers: "You cannot imagine the power of this piece unless you were in the room. All of those professional women, just shaken to their cores by this piece."[95] After meeting so much resentment in Europe, this single performance marked a huge turning point in Osborne and Conant's career. From then on, they decided that they would focus their tours in America, where their feminist works were met with enthusiasm and encouragement.[96]

A Language of Her Own

The underlying concept of *Miriam: The Chair* is that Miriam does not have a language to creatively express herself with. Osborne proposes that "the very nature of language is patriarchal, and the evolution of language over the millenniums has always been oriented around a male perspective."[97] Miriam's conundrum is that she is trying to express something in which a language does not exist—"More words, and more words, but not a song to sing!" (m. 315) Miriam must create her own language. The questions that remain are: why does Miriam not have a language of her own and how does she sing her world into being?

Osborne's description of Miriam in the initial stage directions reveals that she is unkempt, wearing a dirty night gown and sitting in a large wooden chair—a chair that Conant describes as, "part child's high chair, part torture chair, part electric chair." Being in an asylum, relegated to her chair, Miriam is treated both like a child and a madwoman.

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[95] Mark Adamo, "The Trombonist Who Locked Horns: Abbie Conant, Fighting Back With Her Art," *The Washington Post*, March 14, 1994. Accessed through < http://osborne-conant.org/washington.htm> (Accessed April 2013).

[96] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

[97] Ibid.

She has a comforting blanket on her lap, but her chair is also equipped with wrist clamps to keep her in place. When experiencing *Miriam: The Chair* as a stand-alone work, it is initially unclear why Miriam is in her asylum chair. The first part of the trilogy, *The Mirror*, depicts Miriam's suicide attempt, which is what causes her to be sent to the asylum. An asylum is not a place that breeds creativity; Miriam's physical surroundings were constructed to constrict her in every possible way.

As mentioned earlier, Osborne and Conant hold the belief that creative expression is an important component of the human experience, and people who are suppressed in their creative expression "can develop existential, spiritual, and psychological problems."[98] Though Miriam is troubled, she is not a madwoman. She is merely trying to express herself in a world in which she has been told to be silent.

A Mask Playing to Masks

Miriam's "mask" is another visual aspect of *Miriam: The Chair* that has deep philosophical meaning. The work begins with Miriam holding a white plaster mask before her face—the eyes of the mask portray a mournful weeping (Figure 83). Miriam uses the mask throughout the work, especially when she feels that she must conceal her true self. Of course, this very obvious usage of a mask also represents that Miriam feels she must play certain roles in life. As an artist, she wishes to express herself creatively, and as a mother, she feels obligated to her children and family. These stereotypical roles that Miriam must fill trouble her and cause her immense pain, which she bravely and openly confronts on the stage.

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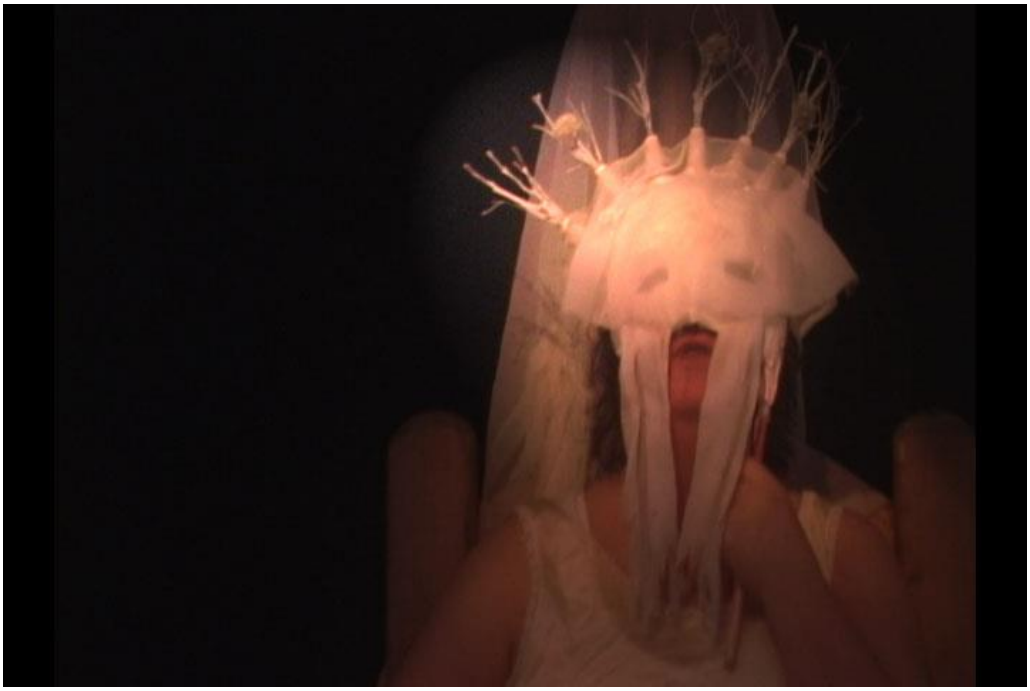
[98] William Osborne and Abbie Conant, Interview with Jessica Ducharme (August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico).

Figure 83: Abbie Conant Wearing Her Mask in *Miriam: The Chair*[99]



Formal Structure and Feminist Themes

In the next sections, the author will address how Osborne presents the main feminist themes—Miriam's lack of language and her masks—within the formal A.E.R. structure. An emphasis will be placed on text analysis, dramatic gestures, and musical representations of the various feminist themes. Osborne utilizes these various elements in conjunction with the formal structure to present Miriam's psychological and emotional journey in search of a viable creative expression.

Feminist Themes in the Anticipation

Miriam's own reaction to her brief performance reveals that she is convinced that her words are meaningless. Miriam sings in measures 13-15 as she reviews her composition, "Nothing but empty words—all useless. Try to keep singing. Just prattle a

[99] Abbie Conant, from http://www.osborne-conant.org/miriam-slides/19mask%20interlude%20red.jpg (accessed May 2013).

few more lines—a few more empty lines. It just won't be stopped" (mm. 13-15). She also refers to her words as "rubbish," "tireless and hopeless," and "garrulous." Miriam's negativity runs deep; it in unclear whether or not she truly feels her words are meaningless, or if she is just repeating what she has been told. Miriam makes every attempt to search for suitable words. She even consults a dictionary, and as she reads aloud the various words, she stops to read some of the definitions. The first word that she reads the definition to is "gone-ness," defined as, "a state of exhaustion: faintness" (mm. 107-108). She reads the definition to "gone goose" as, "a person in a hopeless predicament; someone doomed." These particular words do not help Miriam express herself in a creative way, but rather, they reiterate her hopeless situation. Her desperate attempt to search for words in the dictionary is useless, and she cannot express herself within the confines of a patriarchal language. At the culmination of the Anticipation, Miriam rips out the pages of her composition from the manuscript and throws them in the air in frustration—the ultimate representation of her belief that her expression is worthless.

Miriam wears her mask at the beginning of the work as she sings the "Singing to Herself" melody. This melody is her first attempt at composition, and her mask-wearing shows that she is not comfortable expressing herself as Miriam—she feels that she must conceal her true self. Miriam also takes time during the Anticipation to inspect her appearance in the mirror that she has on the desk of her chair. Miriam powders her nose and applies eyeliner. The use of makeup is not only another form of a mask, but it is also a stereotypical behavior that many women feel obligated to perform. Miriam applies the makeup to appear beautiful and happy to her children; it is a mere cover-up to her

degraded appearance, and her outward appearance is a reflection of her inner turmoil. Miriam also uses the eyeliner pencil to draw on her face. She draws a stylized brow over her left eye and later a stylized tear on her left cheek. This physical representation of sadness is almost clown-like—a silent expression of inner sadness that cannot be expressed with words.

Feminist Themes in the Event

Prattle and Interlude

During the Prattle section, Miriam makes many revelations. She succumbs to the realization that "these tedious broken words will never make the stage." Miriam grows angrier and angrier when she realizes that her family would rather that she be an untrue version of herself when she says, "It's clear that they would prefer that I follow the rules, that I warble some dead tune into the ground, not a thought of who I am, hardly a moment to be myself, just the twittering of a happy woman." Miriam's role as a woman and mother is to put on a happy face and provide cheery entertainment, hiding who she truly is and what she wants to express. Miriam does not have a language to express herself with, and she also does not have an audience that wants to hear what she has to say. Miriam considers babbling whatever comes into her head—empty words. She says, "So what if I sing anything that comes into my head. Prattling on just to keep up the rhythmical flow, while they rummage about in their cultured souls pondering what it means." There is a sense of sarcasm in her words as she realizes what her relationship with her children has become. Her choice of words at the end of the Prattle section is particularly disturbing: "They'll leave there imagining you are alive, to say nothing of your fascinating body. Imagine that! All those imagined intellectuals, all those imagined

artists. You know, all those imagined moments, when a woman gnaws off…gnaws off, her…tongue." There is ambiguity in her statement, but the phrase "gnaws off, her…tongue" depicts a slow and painful silencing, which is exactly what Miriam is experiencing in the asylum.

Trombone and Voice

Miriam succumbed to singing a melodrama as a means to entertain. Again, there is ambiguity in her story. It is not entirely clear if her melodrama is fictional or autobiographical, but it is clear that Miriam gets fully immersed in the terrors of her story. The first stanza of Miriam's melodrama depicts the hardships of a single mother:

> She was once a mother,
> but then came that day.
> Father gone away.
> Mother left to care for all.
> She was buried in her song.[100]

The use of the past tense in "she was once a mother, but then came that day" presents an interesting situation. A plausible interpretation is that the mother was going to cease being a mother—possibly by committing suicide. The word "buried" in "She was buried in her song" also hints at death or a grave. It is unclear whether her creative expression of song kills her or if the running water from her locked bathroom plays a role.

Miriam's trombone interjections play an important role in heightening the emotion of the melodrama. The use of the trombone in this section is but an extension of Miriam's voice—an alternative language and mode of expression. These trombone interjections gain intensity as Miriam's story gains intensity. Interestingly, the trombone interjections continue after Miriam has delivered all of the text in her melodrama,

[100] William Osborne, *Miriam: The Chair,* m. 226.

allowing the horrors of her story to continue as the trombone line gets increasingly dramatic and out of control, culminating in her piercing scream through the instrument.

Feminist Themes in the Reflection

Miriam's journey in the Reflection is a constant struggle between accepting defeat and striving to transcend her situation. The dramatic climax in the Trombone and Voice section seem to cause Miriam to feel defeated, for she immediately resorts back to the negative and dark place that she has been conditioned to exist within. Miriam says, "Ah, I've had better nights. But when it's possible to sing all your words, you need say nothing. Oh one sentence might have a point, but silence is best." Though she says this, she is completely aware of her situation and confronts it openly. Miriam says, "Can it be true that you have some words, good words, singable words?" That said, she follows with, "Played out to all of those looking at me, a woman and her voice in useless effort, a mask playing to masks." Miriam acknowledges that she has something within her that is worth sharing, but her efforts are wasted, for she is a "mask playing to masks." In every sense, Miriam is in "the wasteland" and surrounded by inauthenticity.

In an effort to transcend the wasteland, Miriam continues her attempt to search for sing-able words, this time using her palms as a writing canvas. Miriam's body is already in a state of neglect and abuse, and she does not hesitate to cause self-inflicted pain as her pen cuts the flesh of her hands. Conant offers insight into what Miriam's bleeding palms signify, "Through self-inflicted pain, she expresses her frustration, anger and sadness about her predicament. Her stigmata testify to her victimhood but subtly allude to a possible transcendence, a rising up."[101] To prevent her transcendence, the clamps on her

[101] Abbie Conant, "Diving Back Into the Bitter Waters of *Miriam,"* June 13, 2011, http://www.osborne-conant.org/Miriam.htm#diving (accessed February 2013).

chair close on her wrists—a brutally obvious portrayal of her oppression. Miriam's search for a language causes her both physical and emotional pain and results in further punishment and entrapment.

The most dramatic representation of Miriam's oppression and meaningless language is her silent, repeated screams of "I love you!" It destroys her to imagine her family telling her to stay in her chair as silent as possible because she loves them and, in turn, is treated like a prisoner. When her shackles are released, Miriam performs a lyrical trombone solo. This beautiful solo is a reminder that art can be created from pain and that song and music are sometimes the only true mode of self-expression. At this point, Miriam already feels that she does not have a language of her own, so why should she even attempt to use her words? Conant offers valuable insight into Miriam's trombone playing as her only means of self-expression:

> The trombone is played as simply an extension of a tortured body. My instrument must take up the speechlessness, the void of words, and sing for the soul who cannot utter another word or sound because they have become empty in the face of unfathomable pain. When one's very context is toxic and wounded, there is little point in having a text.[102]

It is as if Miriam's trombone playing mends her tortured self and frees her, and as is the common occurrence in the Reflection, Miriam confronts her defeated self with hopefulness. Miriam is determined to rise above the wasteland of inarticulateness and bondage that envelops her, for she sings, "Sing, sing angry cries. I'll find the words. I'll find something. Words."

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[102] Abbie Conant, "Diving Back Into the Bitter Waters of *Miriam,"* June 13, 2011, http://www.osborne-conant.org/Miriam.htm#diving (accessed February 2013).

Summary and Reflection on Feminist Themes

Miriam is forever searching for words that she can use to express herself, but the words that she has to choose from exist within a patriarchal language. She searches within herself and draws upon personal experiences, but she cannot seem to find the words. She cries, bleeds, and screams words that will never be heard. But, Miriam's only choice is to keep on singing, to keep on searching, and eventually to create her own language. Miriam is able to express anger, frustration, sadness, beauty, hope, and longing through her trombone playing. In essence, Miriam is able to sing and play her world into being by creating her own language—a musical language.

As an artist, Miriam is stifled. She has been sent away, isolated, and forgotten by her family. Why should Miriam be punished and labeled a madwoman for merely wanting to express herself? Conant offers a possible explanation to an unanswerable question:

> One could argue that Miriam's senses are over-refined, that this is exactly what landed her in the institution. In fact, it is these refined senses that brand her as an artist—an artist not allowed to be an artist. She is in the shadow side of the great artist that is traditionally depicted as male, powerful, and the voice of his nation or culture. Miriam is female, powerless, and has no voice…her senses deliver only pain, darkness, and the loneliness of alienation.[103]

Miriam is punished because she challenges tradition—she challenges the stereotypical roles and masks that are handed to her as a woman. She feels that she must constantly wear a mask, hiding her true self, in order to exist in the patriarchal world that surrounds her. Miriam is not permitted to be an artist in such a world, and she has been thrown away from society for challenging her prescribed role as mother. Miriam's situation is clearly reflective of Conant's experience and treatment in the Munich

[103] Abbie Conant, "Diving Back Into the Bitter Waters of *Miriam,"* June 13, 2011, http://www.osborne-conant.org/Miriam.htm#diving (accessed February 2013).

Philharmonic. She was not a bad trombonist—she was the best trombonist for the job. Conant was discriminated against because she was a successful creative artist that challenged the stereotypical norms of the orchestral trombone section, threatening its historically male uniformity.

Miriam is a character that countless women can relate to. Many women have experienced and continue to endure a stifling existence in a patriarchal world, and Conant's expression as Miriam provides a sense of hope and knowledge that there is another way to be. Albeit painful, Conant's portrayal as Miriam in Osborne's *Miriam: The Chair* provides comfort that one's experiences do not alienate them but have the potential to make them stronger. For in the end, Miriam is determined that she will eventually find the words.

CHAPTER FOUR

STREET SCENE FOR THE LAST MAD SOPRANO (1997)

Background and Context

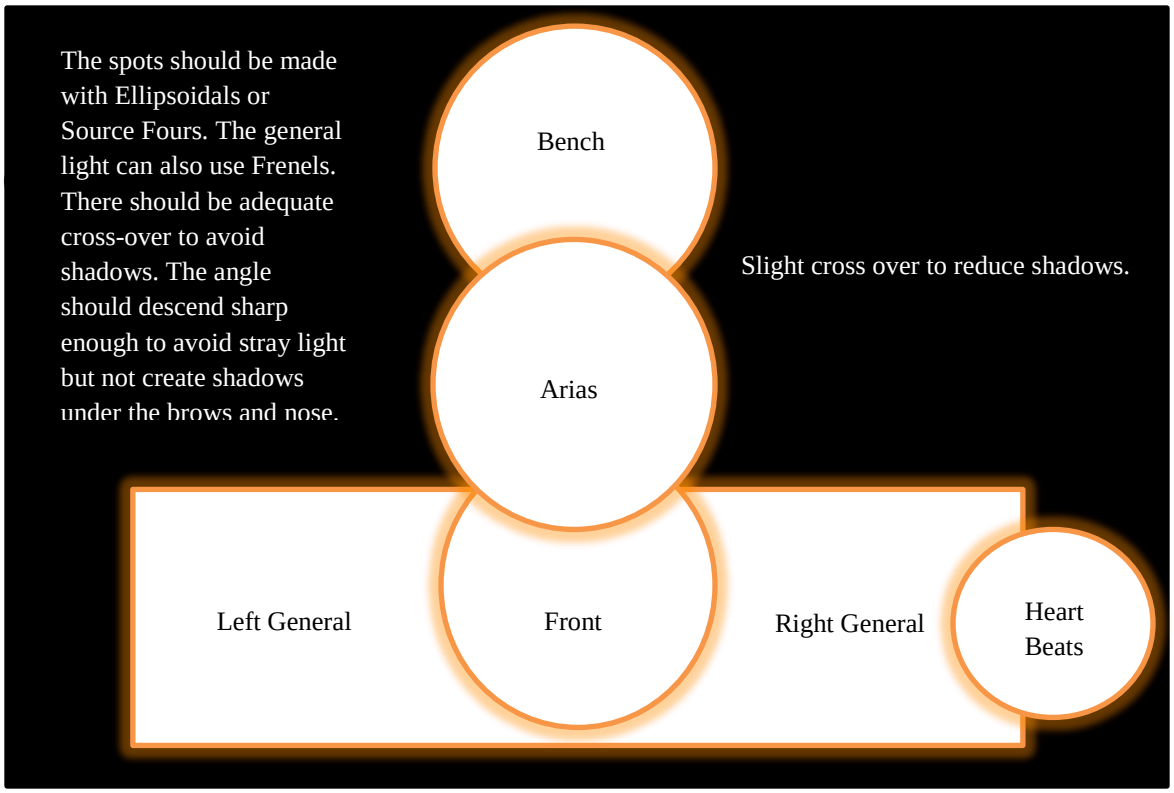
Osborne composed *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano* in 1997. Hereafter referred to as *Street Scene*, this work is the second original chamber music theater work that Osborne composed for Conant. Unlike Osborne's previously composed mono-dramatic chamber music theater works, *Street Scene* features a computer-generated quadrophonic accompaniment. Like Osborne's earlier chamber music theater works, *Street Scene* requires that the performance artist sing, act, and play the trombone. *Street Scene* tells the story of an impoverished opera singer—the "Mad Soprano"—who is preparing for an upcoming audition, but unfortunately, she has nothing to sing. As she struggles to find her voice in song, Osborne systematically addresses the misogynist ideals that pervade female operatic roles.[104] Osborne also addresses the cultural implications that result from a repertoire that historically demeans women as a form of celebratory "art."

Setting the Stage

Osborne provides directions in the score for lighting the stage. By using overlapping circles of light, specific spaces are created for the Mad Soprano to perform various actions (Figure 84).

[104] Osborne was originally inspired by Catherine Clément's book (translated by Betsy Wing): *Opera or the Undoing of Women,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

Figure 84: Stage Lighting for *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano*



Osborne does not indicate how the Mad Soprano should appear, but after studying Conant's recorded performance,[105] the author has sufficient knowledge to describe her appearance. The Mad Soprano should be somewhat disheveled since she is homeless (Figure 85). She should wear many layers as if wearing all she owns. She should also wear a scarf and hat. The bench at the back of the stage should have a bag placed on it holding various odds and ends as well as a music score and an old pair of men's dress shoes.

[105] Abbie Conant's performance can be viewed online at http://osborne-conant.org/Street.htm#video (accessed April 2013).

Figure 85: Abbie Conant as the Mad Soprano[106]

[106] Abbie Conant, from http://www.osborne-conant.org/press-photos/MADCROP.JPG (accessed May 2013).

Synopsis of *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano*

Street Scene tells the story of a homeless opera singer who lives by the dumpsters behind the Met. The audience meets her as she is preparing for her audition the next day. Unfortunately, she cannot decide what to sing and feels unprepared. Her life on the street, coupled with her past operatic roles, has blurred her concept of reality to the point where she has truly become the stereotypical fallen woman—the tragic "Mad Soprano." Even though her repertoire is brimming with operatic arias, swan songs, and even challenging trombone excerpts, she has nothing to sing. She has nothing to sing because the roles that she has become so used to playing are demeaning and misogynistic. The Mad Soprano wrestles with this realization by continuing to search for something to sing by practicing various operatic arias. Throughout *Street Scene* the Mad Soprano periodically embodies Lucia from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Brünhilde from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Mimi from Puccini's *La Bohème,* Arianna from Monteverdi's *L'Arianna*, and Desdemona from Verdi's *Otello*—all in the efforts of trying to find something meaningful to express. The Mad Soprano also tells a story about her friend Betty, who is in an abusive relationship with her husband, creates a new form of expression for herself by playing her trombone, and reflects on her situation as a homeless artist. The work ends on a hopeful note, for the Mad Soprano is determined to sing her world into being as a creative artist.

A.E.R. Structure and Compositional Techniques

In comparison to Osborne's earlier chamber music theater works, *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano* is the most different in both its formal structure and compositional techniques. Osborne composed *Street Scene* within the basic A.E.R. structure, but he did

not model it as closely to *Winnie* and *Miriam.* This slight deviance from the form is predominantly due to the Mad Soprano embodying different operatic characters as she sings various arias throughout the piece. Another formal difference is that the first climax does not occur after an escalating trombone solo, but rather, after a dramatic blackout. Compositionally, Osborne's *Winnie* and *Miriam* trilogy both utilized piano accompaniment, and *Street Scene* is accompanied by a computer-generated quadrophonic accompaniment. Since the Mad Soprano is living on the street, Osborne is able to create a variety of "street sounds," digitally formulating a realistic setting for the production. Osborne continues his tradition of composing in a dodecaphonic style utilizing complimentary combinatorial hexachords to represent the inner life and humanity of his characters. In the next sections the author will outline the adapted A.E.R. structure and discuss the compositional devices that Osborne utilizes and the feminist themes that are presented in *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano*. Since Osborne uses many of the same compositional devices in *Street Scene* as he does in his previous chamber music theater pieces, the author will not discuss those techniques, but rather, the author will address the compositional devices that are unique to this particular work.

Synopsis of the Anticipation

The A section of the three-part Anticipation of the work begins with low and high drones and street sounds. A spot light rises on the Mad Soprano, who is standing center stage with her arms and gaze upward. After playing a quiet and majestic melody on her trombone, the Mad Soprano sits on her bench and rummages in her bag for a music score. After finding it, the Mad Soprano addresses the audience singing, "Tomorrow is my audition! What will I sing for them? I wonder what they'll do. I lied about my age! I feel

unprepared! What am I going to wear? Armor? Or shackles? My scarf? There's nothing to be done. I'll just give it my best." The Mad Soprano, trying to practice for her audition, sings as Lucia from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lamermoor.* She dissolves the aria and comments that she has lost her voice and also "gossips" to the audience about her homeless friend Betty. Still wanting to prepare for her audition, the Mad Soprano re-enters her role as Lucia and sings the aria. She continues alternating between singing her aria and sharing her doubts about her audition with the audience. The Mad Soprano then decides that perhaps the audition panel would like to hear something original, so she sings about her friend Betty. The B section, beginning at rehearsal number 24, is comprised of the Mad Soprano's haunting story about Betty. Osborne indicates in the stage directions that: "She [the Mad Soprano] sings, relishing the gossip, but with hints of her own fear, anxiety and anger." The Mad Soprano's story about Betty centers on the domestic abuse that Betty endures from her husband. Betty was supposed to polish her husband's shoes but did not, so he yelled at her and threatened to hit her with the un-polished shoes. The Mad Soprano is actually holding a man's dress shoe that she retrieved from her bag as she tells the story, which seems to trouble her. As if to distract herself, she goes back to singing her aria as Lucia but ends short and goes back to tell the rest of her story about Betty. The Mad Soprano sings:

> He said: "My mother never treated me that way."
> She said: "You don't need a mother anymore."
> *Pause*
> And he hit her.
> That ended their arguments.
> He was much bigger.[107]

[107] *Street Scene*, p. 11.

Seemingly haunted by her own story, the Mad Soprano reflects a moment and then begins to embody the role of Brünhilde, singing a selection of an aria from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The short A^1 section concludes the Anticipation with the Mad Soprano commenting on why it is so easy to sing her memorized roles. She then embodies Mimi from Puccini's *La Bohème*, concluding the section.

Synopsis of the Event

Prattle and Interlude

The Prattle section begins with the Mad Soprano addressing the audience in a "vivacious, rhythmic, and dance-like, but also pensive" style.[108] Osborne indicates in his stage directions: "She quickly walks back front center stage to address a specific member of the audience. During the interludes she paces left of right, quickly turning to address another member of the audience. The effect should be something like a mad professor."[109] During the Prattle, the Mad Soprano comments on why she sings even though she knows her repertoire has its shortcomings. The author has extracted her complete text from the Prattle:

> I'm not saying we have a lot to sing,
> But I am saying what we do sing is not without its problems.
> *Pause.*
> The singing being less problematic than knowing what to sing,
> for there are only so many things to say,
> and that is all we can sing.
> *Pause.*
> But of course, I could NOT sing!
> And just sit here and be a silent, thinking head.
> *Pause.*
> And then I sing and there I am again,
> suddenly raised to breath and concrete form,
> no end in sight,

[108] *Street Scene*, beginning 1 measure after rehearsal number 37.

[109] Ibid.

thundering along like something real,
something visible and solid.
Pause.
And then I'm silent,
and I fade away into the darkness.
Just like a dream…
as it were.
Pause.
But then one might ask,
if I'm not real,
who is this not singing?
For sometimes 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.
Pause.[110]

It is clear that the Mad Soprano is aware that her repertoire lacks substance, but when she does not sing, she feels as if she does not exist. Singing gives her life; in silence she disappears. After a short xylophone interlude, the Mad Soprano enters the Trombone & Voice section.

Trombone and Voice

The Mad Soprano plays various short trombone melodies that Osborne notates as "virtuosic," "waltzing," and "driving." She plays these melodies, occasionally breaking to address the audience. The author has extracted the text from this section:

Will this help my audition?
Or am I spreading myself too thin?
Trombone interjection
And then I stop playing and suddenly I'm gone again,
back to a gossamer thread of silence,
not even my horn real.
Trombone interjection
Such a noble instrument!
I suppose it could make an impression
la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la
Trombone interjection
I hope this is leading to something more than my usual collapse!
Trombone interjection[111]

[110] *Street Scene*, beginning at rehearsal number 37 until 11 measures after rehearsal number 39.

The Mad Soprano thinks of her trombone playing as another form of artistic expression, and she feels the same invisibility when she stops playing—a "gossamer thread of silence." She sees her trombone playing as a possible alternative to singing, but she is still suspicious that her trombone playing could lead to her "collapse" as her operatic roles typically do. After her trombone playing, the voice section is extended, postponing the inevitable climax of the Event section.

After she returns to her bench, it begins to rain and thunder—sounds digitally created by Osborne in the accompaniment. The Mad Soprano opens her umbrella and performs a quasi *pas de deux*—dancing a waltz with her umbrella. She then enters the role of Arianna from Monteverdi's *L'Arianna*, singing an Italian aria. The Mad Soprano then moves far stage right and delivers a short revealing monologue. The sincerity of her words is heightened by the accompaniment sounds of a beating heart. Osborne indicates in his stage directions:

> She moves to a spot about three meters downstage right. The light crossfades 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 pauses, as she waits for the cues, she continues to impassively look at the audience.[112]

The Mad Soprano delivers her monologue:

> Sometimes I think people are listening.
> *Short pause.*
> Or am I only imagining?
> I thought I heard them breathing.
> I just made that up about Betty.
> *Short pause.*
> It's really me who's beaten.

---

[111] *Street Scene*, rehearsal numbers 41-45.

[112] Ibid., "Heartbeats," p. 23.

> He does it for his…
> *Short pause.*
> satisfaction.
> I don't remember people any more.[113]

This revelatory monologue most likely confirms the audience's suspicions that "Betty" was really the Mad Soprano all along. In effort to dispel her shame and sadness, the Mad Soprano embodies Mimi once again, singing of flowers and springtime. After dissolving the aria, the Mad Soprano returns to stage right and accompanied by the beating heart, says:

> If I stay here, he'll beat me for singing.
> But I have to practice.
> Tomorrow, I'll be all bloody.
> That's why I think of Mozart playing billiards.
> One ball hitting the other, and on and on
> by perfect chance till all is silence.
> That's what it's like here at night.
> I hear all those little sounds.
> A click here, a clack there,
> till stillness reigns.[114]

The Mad Soprano's two worlds of reality and her operatic roles are blurred and converging. She feels that she must take a chance and practice even though she knows that she will be beaten by her husband for singing. Ironically, if she practices and wins the lead role at her audition, she will most likely be treated the same way—either beaten or killed as the tragic fallen woman in the operatic plot. There is no escape for the Mad Soprano—if she chooses to sing, she will eventually be silenced until "stillness reigns."

The Mad Soprano then continues her story about Betty. This time Betty stands up to her husband and throws his unpolished shoes in the frog pond, concluding with, "He

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[113] *Street Scene*, rehearsal number 56.

[114] Ibid., rehearsal number 59.

didn't like that."[115] She then embodies the role of Desdemona from Verdi's *Otello*, singing the famous "Willow Song." After dissolving the aria the Mad Soprano says, "It's getting dark. Tonight, Betty will be beaten."[116] It is if all of the Mad Soprano's stories about Betty have been leading to this point, and suddenly the entire stage climatically goes black. As the lights rise, the Mad Soprano is seen with blood on her palms and on the corner of her mouth. The Reflection begins as she begins to wipe the blood away with a handkerchief.

Synopsis of the Reflection

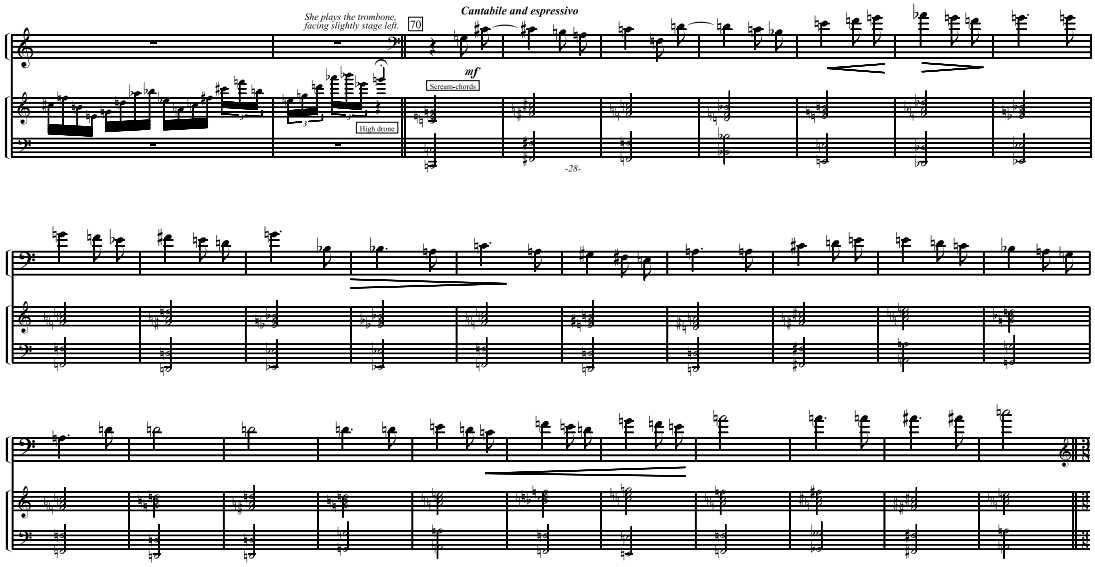
The Mad Soprano wipes her bloody face and hands and says dryly, "Today is my audition. Last night, Betty was beaten. She'll tell them it's her stage makeup."[117] The Mad Soprano's persona as Betty, as well as her role as an opera singer is one in the same. There is no distinction between her tragic life as a homeless singer, her abusive relationship with her husband, and the operatic roles that celebrate her demise as a celebratory art form. The Mad Soprano then sings a poetic description about the almost scientific construction of the portrayal of love and passion in opera. She then plays a beautifully lyrical trombone solo that Osborne marks as *Cantabile and espressivo* over synthesized block chords that alternate between major and minor tonalities. The Mad Soprano's beautiful trombone solo steadily climbs higher and crescendos until she soars on a high C (Figure 86).

[115] *Street Scene*, 2 measures before rehearsal number 61.

[116] Ibid., 4 measures after rehearsal number 63.

[117] Ibid., beginning 2 measures after rehearsal number 65.

Figure 86: Lyrical Trombone Solo—*Cantabile and espressivo*

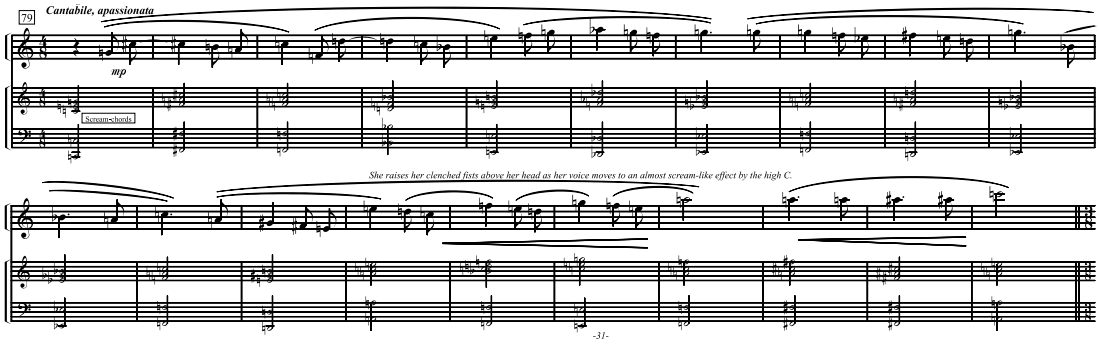


She addresses the audience once again and resolves that her operatic roles are not art but "entertainment." She says, "Sometimes they look at me, and sometimes they applaud…like when watching pigeons. They feel better for it then walk on. It's not art. It's a question of… entertainment."[118] The Mad Soprano then sings in a recitative style, "So I sing operatically rolled R's in my prayers. But I don't feel bad. We're ALL homeless. Shall I crawl on my stomach and beg for something to sing? Shall I crawl on my stomach and sing?"[119] The Mad Soprano desperately wants to be an artist, but what should she have to endure to become one? She then sings the same lyrical melody that she recently played on her trombone, but she does so without words (Figure 87). As she approaches the high C, her arms are raised over her head with clenched, determined fists.

[118] *Street Scene*, rehearsal number 72.

[119] Ibid., rehearsal number 74

Figure 87: Wordless Song—*Cantabile, espressivo*



But reality sets in—she realizes that it is time for her audition, and she still does not know what she will sing. She says, "It's time for my audition, and I'm worried I'll never sing again. How will I live? Sit here and be pretty? I'll just have to go unprepared, without a song, nothing to show for myself. No I can't do that. I'll work on something—a piece to keep me going. I don't know what to do. There's no time left."[120] In her frustration, she angrily yells, "Do you know what it means to be without a song? People will step on you."[121] The Mad Soprano is lost in the wasteland—she is doomed no matter what she chooses, so rather than attempting to live in the wasteland, she decides to transcend it. Standing center stage, the Mad Soprano sings a gradually rising chromatic scale on "ah." As she pushes her range to its extreme, her outstretched arms rise above her head. Gathering her belongings, she sings with a sense of peacefulness and resolution:

> Tomorrow night the lights will rise,
> floating by themselves in loves order.
> And far from this corner on the street,
> we'll sing from our hearts.
> You and I.

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[120] *Street Scene*, beginning 7 measures after rehearsal number 80.

[121] Ibid., beginning 3 measures after rehearsal number 81.

We'll sing from our hearts.
You and I.
You and I.[122]

Osborne's *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano* ends with a glimmer of hope in that the Mad Soprano finally formulates her own dreams.

Compositional Devices Utilized in *Street Scene*

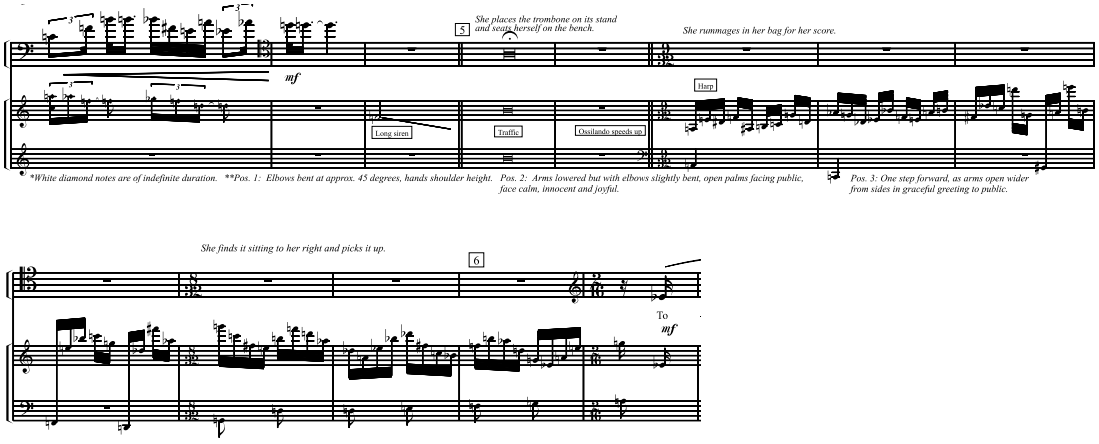
Overall, Osborne utilizes the same techniques in *Street Scene* as he does in his previous chamber music theater works including: varied vocal treatments, motifs, gestural flourishes, and trombone interludes. However, in this new work, Osborne also develops new compositional techniques including: digitally created sound effects and instrumental sounds, specified stage locations for specific actions, and quotations from various operatic arias.

Computer-generated Accompaniment

By using a computer-generated accompaniment, Osborne is able to create many rich textures and soundscapes that bring the Mad Soprano's drama to life. The setting of the work is on a street corner, so Osborne uses many "street sounds," such as traffic, sirens, wind, and high and low drones. In order to make the score easy to read, Osborne does not notate every single sound that he uses; he often uses cues to notify the performer where she is in the music. Osborne does notate the electronic instrumental lines, though. For example, Osborne uses a harp motif when the Mad Soprano searches for her opera score (Figure 88).

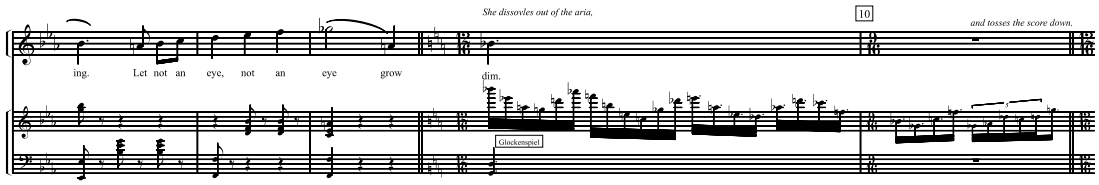
[122] *Street Scene*, rehearsal number 83.

Figure 88: "Searching" Harp Motif



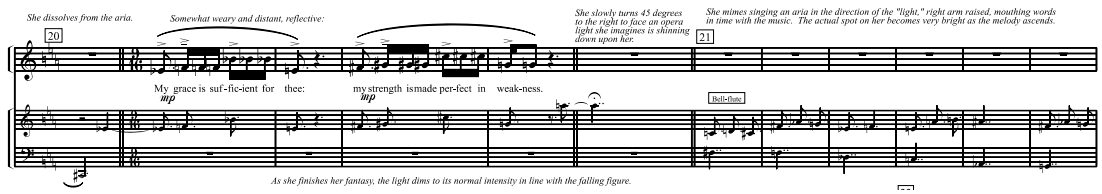
Osborne uses a glockenspiel motif when the Mad Soprano dissolves one of her operatic fantasies (Figure 89).

Figure 89: "Dissolving" Glockenspiel Motif



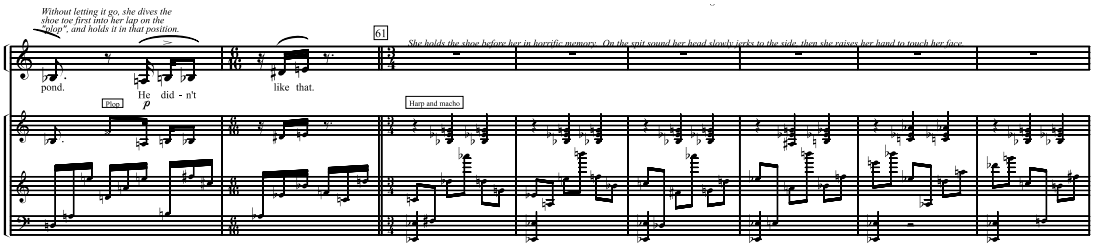
Osborne also uses a bell flute motif when the Mad Soprano mimes singing her arias at rehearsal number 21 (Figure 90).

Figure 90: "Miming" Bell Flute Motif



Sometimes Osborne inserts vocal sounds into the accompaniment. Since the Mad Soprano is practicing for her audition, Osborne inserts ambient sounds of singers performing vocal warm ups. He does not include these cues in the score, but they can be heard on the recording. Another important use of vocal sounds in the accompaniment occurs when the Mad Soprano tells her stories about her friend Betty. Osborne inserts the husband's lines into the accompaniment, essentially creating an additional supporting character. Similarly, Osborne inserts accompaniment voices and sounds when the Mad Soprano relives a dark memory as she finishes her story about Betty. At rehearsal number 61, Osborne indicates that the Mad Soprano: "holds the shoe before her in horrific memory. On the spit sound her head slowly jerks to the side, and she raises her hand to touch her face." As the Mad Soprano relives this memory, a harp plays a waltz figure and "macho" pig snorts and angry male voices sound (Figure 91).

Figure 91: Harp and Macho



Osborne also uses accompaniment voices to bring out the Mad Soprano's inner feelings. During the Reflection and after the Mad Soprano says, "Today is my audition. Last night, Betty was beaten. She'll tell them it's her stage make-up," she stands downstage right as whispered accompaniment voices say, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes" repeatedly. It is not clear who the whispered voice comes from, but it could represent the Mad

Soprano's inner feelings. The whispered text is a quotation from the Biblical Psalm 119:136, and the full verse reads: "Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they keep not your law,"[123] suggesting an inner sadness or shame felt by someone who did not follow the laws of God. In the Mad Soprano's case, she was beaten by her husband for singing and not polishing his shoes; she broke "patriarchal law."

Stage Locations for Specific Actions

Unlike Winnie, who is immobilized and sinking into the ground, or Miriam, who is relegated to her chair, the Mad Soprano has full mobility, and she makes use of the entire stage. As described earlier, the stage has a bench towards the rear, and spotlights shine on different areas of the stage that the Mad Soprano uses for various activities. Osborne has prescribed specific locations for the Mad Soprano to perform her various activities such as singing her arias, addressing the audience, telling her stories, and playing her trombone. (Refer back to Figure 84 to see a diagram of the stage setup.) The spatial organization of the stage makes it very obvious when the Mad Soprano enters a fantasy or remains in reality, for she literally steps in and out of her fantasy world. The climax that occurs at the end of the Trombone & Voice section is made even more dramatic when all of the stage lights are suddenly turned off. This blackout allows for the transition into the following day where the Mad Soprano is found beaten and bloody.

Motifs and Arias

In Osborne's earlier chamber music theater works, he made an abundant use of motifs to represent actions, themes, and moods. Osborne uses motifs in a slightly different way in *Street Scene*. He uses the harp, glockenspiel, and bell flute motifs to represent specific actions, but Osborne uses quotations from different arias most

[123] *Bible*, Psalm 119:136.

abundantly in *Street Scene.* While the arias that the Mad Soprano sings are all different, they each are tainted with misogyny. The quoted arias are essentially a motif for the subjugation of women in opera. But the Mad Soprano, fully immersed in her art, actually lives her operatic roles. The misogyny found in opera is also found in the Mad Soprano's everyday life.

Tonally, the adaptation of the different arias is the only instance where Osborne breaks from his combinatorial hexachord method of composition. Throughout the work, the Mad Soprano embodies the roles of Lucia, Brünhilde, Mimi, Arianna, and Desdemona. The musicological significance of each operatic character will be discussed in a later section. See the Mad Soprano's embodiment of Donizetti's Lucia in Figures 92 and 93 below.

Figure 92: Mad Soprano as "Lucia"

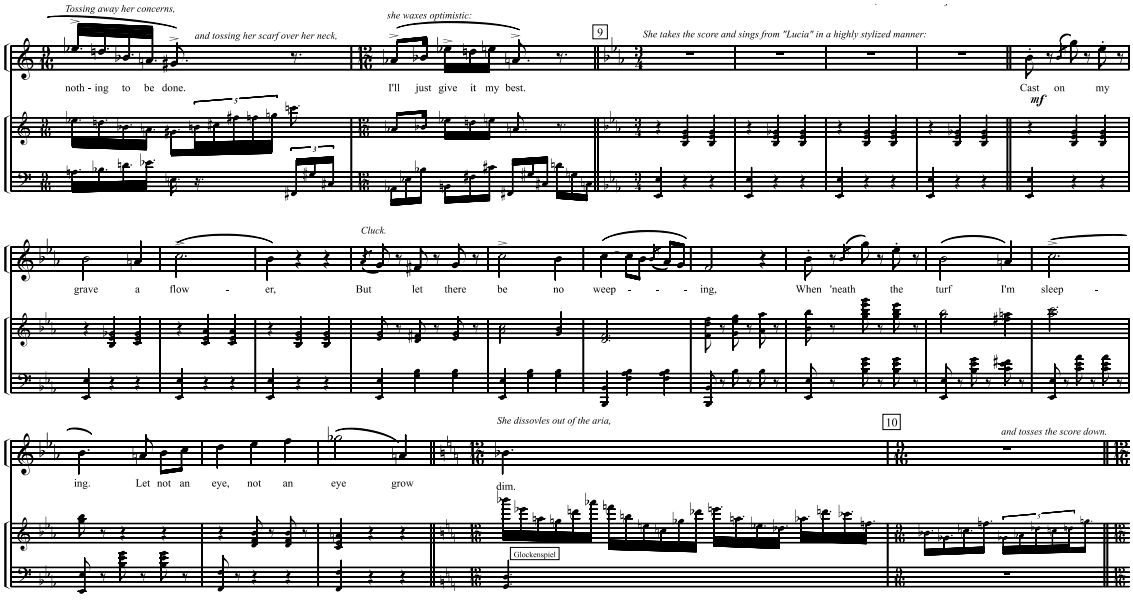
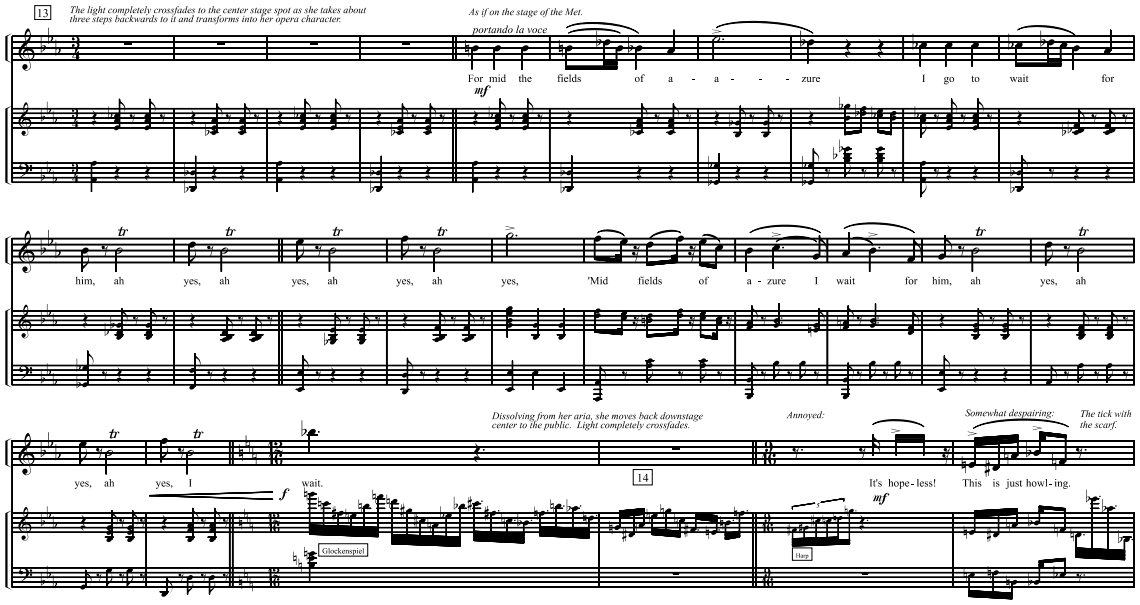
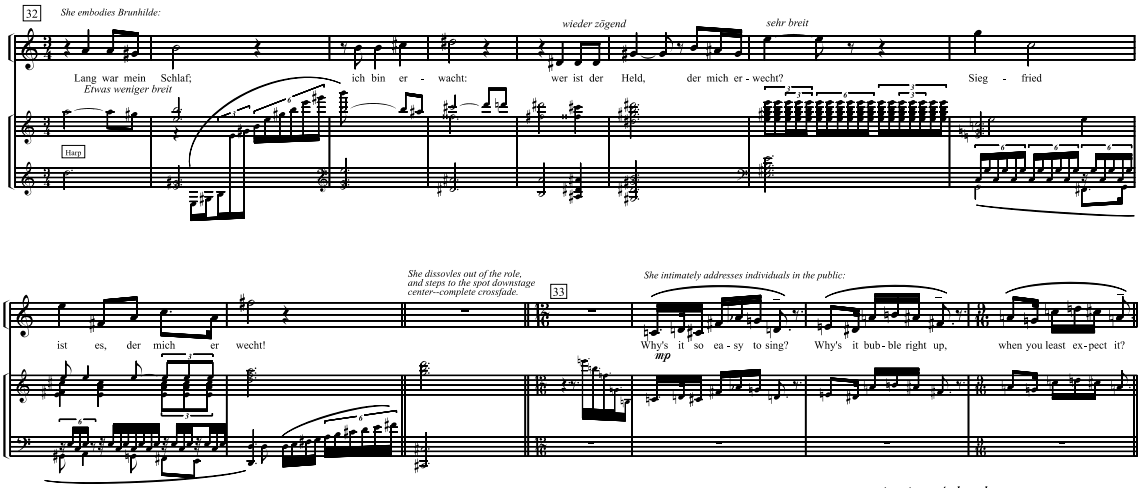


Figure 93: Mad Soprano as "Lucia"



This highly stylized form of singing is unlike Osborne's traditional text settings, for it is filled with trills and melismata. After the Mad Soprano tells her story about Betty, she embodies Wagner's Brünhilde and takes the center stage pretending to hold a spear and shield (Figure 94).

Figure 94: Mad Soprano as "Brünhilde"



After quickly addressing the public, she embodies Puccini's Mimi (Figures 95 and 96).

Figure 95: Mad Soprano as "Mimi"

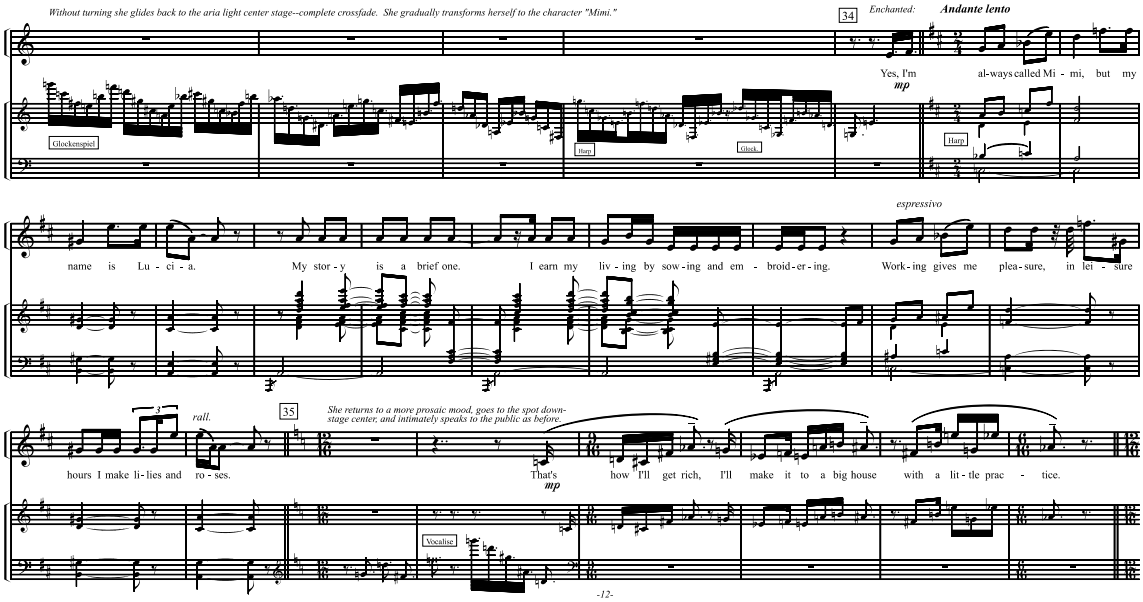
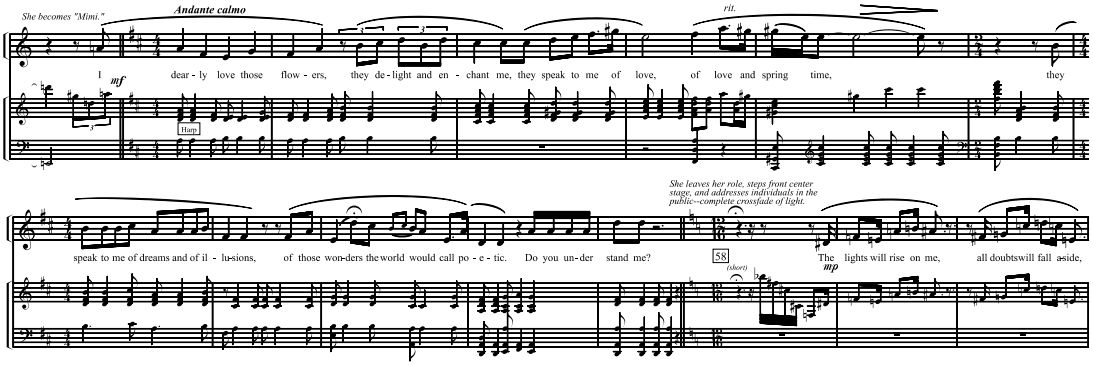
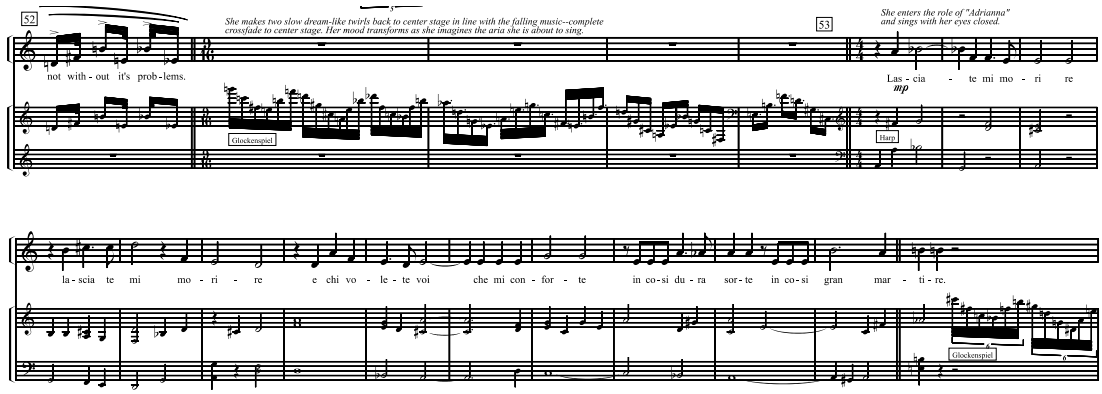


Figure 96: Mad Soprano as "Mimi"



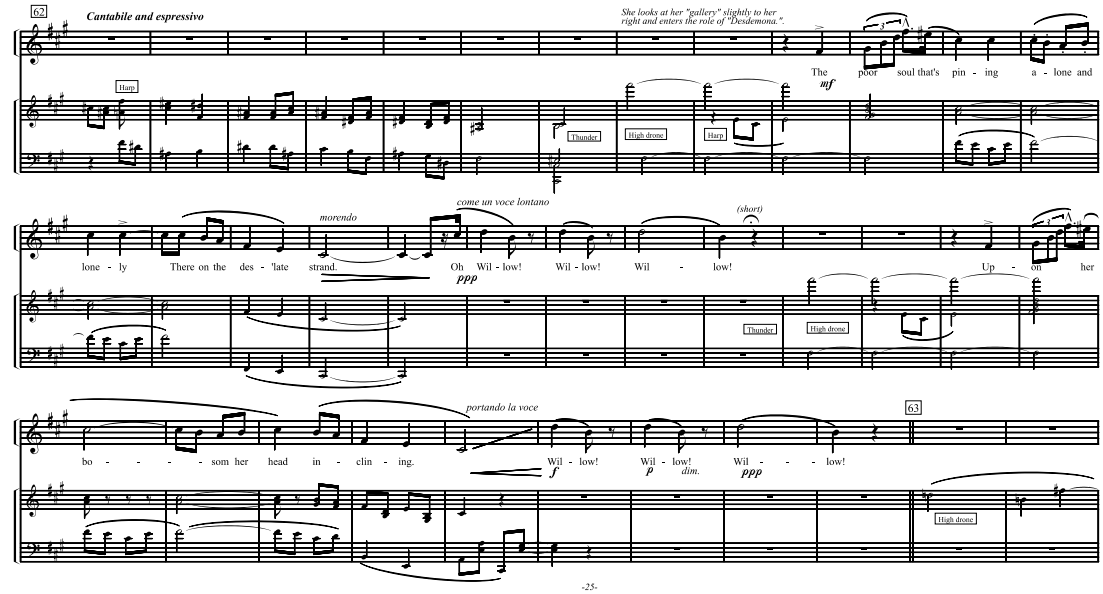
See the Mad Soprano's embodiment of Arianna as she sings a portion of the Italian aria accompanied by the harp below in Figure 97.

Figure 97: Mad Soprano as "Arianna"



The last operatic character that the Mad Soprano embodies is that of Desdemona, the brave woman who stood up to her accusing husband (Figure 98).

Figure 98: Mad Soprano as "Desdemona"



Osborne is able to create a varied texture by alternating between the Mad Soprano's reality and her embodiment of operatic characters.

Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano and Feminist Themes

In his program notes for *Street Scene*, Osborne writes: "Oscar Wilde once said, 'Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.' This theme is central to *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano.* Through art we shape the way we view the world and ourselves. Through art we decide what we are as humans and how we will live our lives."[124] Art can sometimes be demeaning, though—especially towards women. This is evident in many operatic works that exude misogynist messages. As a means of addressing the pervasively misogynist attitudes present in opera, *Street Scene* examines the stereotypical ways that women are portrayed in this genre, especially focusing on the violence they suffer. Osborne's *Street Scene* questions why society celebrates and even glorifies operatic works that showcase misogyny. Osborne argues that what women see as their "true worlds" may be the result of patriarchal social constructs. These demeaning roles have become so ingrained in the Mad Soprano's persona that she literally lives the role of the beaten, fallen woman. Osborne and Conant recognize that art reflects the values of its culture, so how can women become creative artists in a culture that celebrates wife beating, submissiveness, and the tragic deaths of strong women? How can women express their creative identities in a patriarchal world? The Mad Soprano challenges the value of her misogynist repertoire by embodying different operatic characters and identifying the problems that she sees in this vast repertoire. She eventually realizes that she cannot participate in this art form and that she must create her own song.

Misogyny in Opera

It is sometimes easy to overlook the misogyny in opera because it is hidden within beautiful music and concealed in convoluted texts. By drawing from the research of

[124] William Osborne, http://osborne-conant.org/Street.htm#notes (accessed April 2012).

modern feminist musicologists and examining the text and background stories of the operatic characters that the Mad Soprano embodies, the author will discuss these dark, misogynist messages that can go unnoticed.

The first aria that the Mad Soprano quotes is Lucia's famous Mad Scene from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). Based on Sir Walter Scott's historical novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Donizetti's opera centers on a tragic love story and the mental breakdown of the "mad" Lucia. In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality,* Susan McClary describes this famous Mad Scene:

> Lucia displays her deranged mind without inhibition as she variously relives erotically charged moments with Edgardo, imagines that they are exchanging vows of marriage, and anticipates her own death, burial, and afterlife in heaven. She has lost touch with outer reality and lives now in a world made up entirely of the shards of her fears, hopes, and dreams.[125]

Another maddening aspect of Lucia's aria is that Donizetti paired her morbid words with a cheerful waltz in E-flat major. The Mad Soprano sings as Lucia:

> Cast on my grave a flower,
> But let there be no weeping,
> When 'neath the turf I'm sleeping,
> Let not an eye grow dim.[126]

Donizetti's Lucia breaks formal traditions and engages in musical excesses that eventually spill upward into a "coloratura delirium," completely contrasting with the arias of the other "sane" characters that conform to typical formal structures and predictable tonalities.[127] Edgardo, the object of Lucia's infatuation, stabs himself in the final scene of Donizetti's opera—evidence of Lucia's contagion. Donizetti not only portrays women as

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[125] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings,* 92.

[126] *Street Scene,* measures 5-19 after rehearsal number 9.

[127] McClary, *Feminine Endings,* 92.

"mad," but also suggests that they are evil for spreading their madness to others. The Mad Soprano finishes her aria as Lucia singing:

> For 'mid the fields of azure
> I go to wait for him,
> Ah yes, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes,
> 'Mid the fields of azure I wait for him,
> Ah yes, ah yes, ah yes
> I wait.[128]

Lucia is just another madwoman completely infatuated with a man. The Mad Soprano begins and dissolves the aria several times; she even mimes singing the aria, further emphasizing that she has nothing meaningful to express and that her operatic roles are fully internalized and operate in a psychological world beyond the scope of sound.

The Mad Soprano stands and pantomimes holding a spear and shield and walks to center stage where she becomes Brünhilde from Wagner's *Siegfried* (1876) Act 3, Scene 3 singing in German:

> Long was my sleep;
> I am awake:
> who is the Hero who woke me?
> Siegfried is it,
> he wakes me! [129]

Brünhilde was sentenced to remain in a deep sleep for sixteen years after disobeying her father Wotan and using her Valkyrie status to rescue Sieglinde, who was incestuously pregnant with Siegmund's baby. Brünhilde's merciless father stripped her of her Valkyrie status and sent her into a deep sleep, only to be awakened by the kiss of a hero who did not know fear. Ironically, it was the baby, Siegfried, who in turn saved her. The Mad

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[128] *Street Scene*, measures 5-23 after rehearsal number 13.

[129] Ibid., p.11, rehearsal no. 32. Mad Soprano sings: "Lang war mein Schlaf; ich bin erwacht: wer ist der Held, der mich wer erwecht? Siegfried ist es, der mich er weckt!

Soprano then comments singing, "Why's it so easy to sing? Why's it bubble right up, when you least expect it?"[130] These operatic roles have obviously permeated the Mad Soprano's mode of self-expression; she cannot just portray these characters—she has to live them. For just like Betty, who was punished for not polishing a shoe, Brünnhilde lost everything and was forced into instigating the end of the world. Wagner's treatment of Brünnhilde places women in a negative light, suggesting that women who disobey male authorities not only deserve to be punished, but that they should also be burdened with blame. Catherine Clément comments on Brünnhilde's role in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*:

> Entering into the story of disobedient women who violate the laws proclaimed by Wotan is the story of the gods as a whole and the end of a world…a woman alone knows the whole story. She [Brünnhilde]…has paid dearly, but she still has one more act to perform: the lighting of the pyre that will burn a whole people.[131]

The Mad Soprano then transforms herself into the character Mimi from Puccini's *La Bohème* (1896), where she sings Mimi's aria describing her brief and simple life as a seamstress. Puccini's Mimi suffered a natural death at the end of the opera, dying in the cold from a cough from which she could not recover. She was portrayed as simple and sweet, falling in love with the young Bohemian Rodolfo. But, even the most pure and gentle women will inevitably suffer death in opera. After breaking from Mimi's aria and entering reality, the Mad Soprano addresses her problems with her operatic roles singing: "But of course I could NOT sing! And just sit here and be a silent, thinking head. And then I sing and there I am again, suddenly raised to breath and concrete form, no end in sight, thundering along like something real, something visible and solid."[132] The Mad

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[130] *Street Scene*, rehearsal no. 33.

[131] Clément, Catherine. *Opera, or the Undoing of Women,* 139.

[132] *Street Scene*, p. 14, three measures before rehearsal no. 38.

Soprano clearly links her spiritual existence to her singing and longs for something meaningful to express. After playing a waltzing figure on her trombone, her other mode of expression, she states, "I hope this is leading to something more than my usual collapse!"[133] She concludes this musical interlude by singing, "I'm not saying we have a lot to sing, but I am saying what we do sing, is not without its problems."[134] The Mad Soprano is obviously not truly "mad," for she is able to recognize the misogyny that envelops the operatic roles that she has been trained to sing.

Upon entering the world as Arianna from Monteverdi's *L'Arianna*, the Mad Soprano sings with her eyes closed, in a dreamlike state:

> Let me die,
> and what do you want,
> you who comfort me in such a harsh fate,
> in this great suffering? [135]

Monteverdi's *L'Arianna* (1607-08) was commissioned to celebrate a royal wedding in the Gonzaga court in Mantua. Performances of this opera would have been accessible to Mantuan women during the early seventeenth century. Another influential source of public literature that would have been available to early modern woman were advice manuals on the *institutione delle donne*—the construction of women. Suzanne Cusick comments on the similarities between Monteverdi's musical discourse and the rhetoric emanating from the *institutione delle donne* saying, "Three recurring tropes in these parallel literatures respond to the apparently universal view that women *were* chaos, material, imperfection, unreason—needing to be contained within marriage if there were

[133] *Street Scene*, rehearsal no. 44.

[134] Ibid., three measures before rehearsal no. 53.

[135] Ibid., pp. 21-22, rehearsal no. 53. Original Italian text sung: Lasciatemi morire! E chi volete voi che mi conforte in così dura sorte, in così gran martire?

to be any social order."[136] *L'Arianna* is somewhat of a cautionary tale for women, for Arianna's "willfulness and autonomy must be purged through suffering before she is worthy to be taken as a wife."[137] The Mad Soprano quotes Monteverdi's lament of Arianna exactly—even the reluctant rise and subsequent fall in her melody alludes to the inevitable downfall of an independent woman. Although the Mad Soprano is in an altered state of reality as she sings this excerpt, the meaning behind it suggests an ingrained desire in which she subconsciously wishes for death—the same message that Monteverdi implies in *L'Arianna.*

After telling the frightening ending to her story about "Betty" and finally standing up to her husband, the Mad Soprano transitions into the role of Desdemona—another woman who would not cave to her husband's accusations. The Mad Soprano sings the "Willow Song" from Verdi's *Otello*:

> The poor soul that's pining alone and lonely
> There on the des'late strand.
> Oh Willow! Willow! Willow!
> Upon her bosom her head inclining.
> Willow! Willow! Willow![138]

In Verdi's opera *Otello* (adapted from Shakespeare, 1887), the "Willow Song" (Act IV, Scene III) serves to foreshadow Desdemona's imminent death. Desdemona sings the "Willow Song" as she remembers her mother's maid singing. After singing the "Willow Song" and bidding goodbye to Emilia, Desdemona prays before going to bed as a wrongfully-accused and innocent woman. Otello then enters her room and tries to force a

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[136] Cusick, Suzanne. *'There was not one lady who failed to shed a tear,' Arianna's lament and the construction of modern womanhood,* 22.

[137] Ibid., 23.

[138] *Street Scene*, p. 25, rehearsal no. 62.

confession out of her, for he thinks that she was unfaithful. When Desdemona does not confess to the adulterous act that she did not commit, Otello strangles her to death and commits suicide after learning that his wife was innocent. Verdi's adaptation of Shakespeare's less-than-subtle implication suggests that women who stand up to patriarchal authority may be punished by death—misogyny at its fullest. The Mad Soprano's rendition of "Willow Song" reflects her own fears of being beaten, even though the song's text does not mention physical abuse. Desdemona's "Willow Song" is one of her final expressions before being strangled to death by her husband Otello. After the Mad Soprano sings her "Willow Song," she says, "It's getting dark. Tonight, Betty will be beaten."[139] After the climactic blackout, during which the Mad Soprano is beaten, she comments that her audition has finally arrived and she will have to tell the judges that her cuts and bruises are just stage make-up, which should be of no surprise to her adjudicators since many female characters in opera are beaten by their male counterparts.

Reflection on *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano*

The Mad Soprano's struggle against the marginalization of the humanity of women throughout the entire work is one to be admired, for she never fully submits to the prophecies of her ingrained operatic roles. The Mad Soprano is a heroine—a true artist. Even though she has rejected her entire operatic repertoire, leaving her with nothing to sing for her audition, her expression of her inner song sings on. The beautiful melodies that she plays on her trombone and sings at the end of the work keep her alive in the wasteland in which she exists and, ultimately, this musical expression allows her to transcend it. Osborne poignantly summarizes the cultural effects that *Street Scene* and his other chamber music theater works hope to produce:

[139] *Street Scene,* p. 26.

> The true identity of women in society will be formulated only when they are allowed to be artists and determine for themselves who they really are. As women find their true place in our culture, we will obtain not only a greater freedom and dignity, but also a fuller and more balanced understanding of human consciousness.[140]

Osborne and Conant have created new musical traditions, both formally and philosophically, that reject the implications of misogyny and enable women to find truth as expressive artists. These new musical traditions will allow women to thrive amid the cultural "wasteland" and even transcend their current place in society.

[140] William Osborne, http://osborne-conant.org/Street.htm, 1997. Accessed March 15, 2012.

CONCLUSION

William Osborne and Abbie Conant are expressive artists, creating new musical traditions with a feminist voice. They believe there are fundamental flaws in opera that include massive casts and sets, obstructed texts, and extended musical forces. In response, they sought to create a genre of chamber music theater in an effort to balance and integrate music, text, and theater. Since 1981, Osborne and Conant have been performing their chamber music theater works in their company The Wasteland Company. The Wasteland Company productions began with musical adaptations of works by Samuel Beckett that continue to influence the work of Osborne and Conant. After Osborne composed *Winnie*, an adaptation of Beckett's *Happy Days*, he had the desire to author a text and produce an original work for Abbie Conant to perform. Osborne's original chamber music theater works are modeled after *Winnie.*

During this period in the 1980s, Conant experienced sexist discrimination as the solo trombonist with the Munich Philharmonic, a position she was awarded after a blind audition. The pain that Conant felt after enduring thirteen years of legal battles with the orchestra led Osborne to compose and produce the *Miriam* trilogy and *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano.* These two works express feminist themes in the form of mono-dramatic music theater and require the performance artist to sing, act, and play trombone.

Though all characters in the three works examined in this study are different, they share many similarities and express similar hardships. Winnie is a quirky character developed by Beckett. She has a bubbly and optimistic personality despite her impossible situation. Winnie talks incessantly in an effort to pass the long hours of the day and to create a sense of companionship in her lonely world. Miriam, developed by Osborne and

Conant, is a somber woman. She represents an archetype of an abused and neglected woman who has been placed in an asylum. Relegated to her chair, Miriam faces stereotypical female masks of culture that she feels coerced to wear. Miriam yearns to be an artist, yet she discovers that she lacks a language of her own for expression. Though imprisoned and forgotten, Miriam is determined to find the words—to find her voice. The Mad Soprano is an impoverished opera singer living on the streets. She wants to prepare an upcoming audition, but realizes that the operatic roles that she has memorized are all demeaning and misogynistic. The Mad Soprano embodies different characters with longing to create their own song. She is an artist who rejects the repertoire that exists for her as a singer and is determined to rise above the cultural wasteland that surrounds her.

Winnie, Miriam, and the Mad Soprano are all searching. Winnie is searching for companionship and to make the passing of time more meaningful. Miriam is searching for a language to create her own music theater works. The Mad Soprano is searching for a repertoire with self-respect. In all three cases, the women must create their own song—they must sing their worlds into being. The trombone is an expressive tool in each piece. The characters in each work play the trombone when they are lost for words but must express something.

The close collaboration between Osborne and Conant is an evolving artistic relationship. Together, they create meaningful chamber music theater works that explore the identity of women. Conant and Osborne have experienced the effects of patriarchy and sexism, and they reject all the stereotypes it represents. They have known the wasteland and have chosen another way. The current work that Osborne and Conant are developing, entitled *Aletheia*, explores the idea of an artist who completely rejects the

musical tradition and creates her own artistic world. Naming the wasteland, she is alone but true to herself. *Aletheia* will be Osborne and Conant's longest work to date and will be premiered in Vancouver, British Columbia in September of 2013. The author will consider *Aletheia* for a future study since the work portends to be the culmination of Osborne and Conant's repertoire.

Apart from social criticism, the works by Osborne and Conant are valuable additions to the trombone repertoire. These works are in every sense challenging, even daunting for the performer, but they are thematically and structurally rich. *Winnie*, *Miriam: The Chair*, and *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano* are not for the faint of heart, and the performer must bravely bear her soul as an artist. Yet, these musical works uniquely express a feminist voice that ignites the creative identity of women. Our society and culture is in desperate need of art that contains philosophical sustenance.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Interview conducted by Jessica Ducharme (J) with William Osborne (B) and Abbie Conant (A), August 12, 2012, Taos, New Mexico.

J: Bill, can you describe the formal structure of you chamber music theater compositions?

B: So this is kind of the general outline of how our pieces work. And this is basically…when I start conceptualizing pieces. There's this Anticipation…you establish what it's all about with the first sentence, and it just revolves around that. In this Anticipation section I usually have a little "B" section. The first part in the *Mad Soprano* is when she's getting ready for her audition, and then she sings about her friend Betty living in a box down the street—that's the "B" section, and then she goes back to getting ready for her audition. In *Winnie*, she's going through all of her morning rituals, and then she stops and reads the directions on the medicine bottle, and she kind of reflects on what it means to be getting old, and then she goes back to doing what she was doing. With *Miriam*, she's just sitting there writing in that notebook, and then she stops and kind of in a reflective way, reads out of the dictionary…she reads various words, and then goes back to the notebook. And then she throws the papers into the air. The Anticipations have a sort of punch line, like with Miriam throwing the papers in the air. Or with *Winnie*, she gets a magnifying glass and holds it over the toothbrush and reads, "Hog's setae. Hog's setae?!" And that's the end of the section. So, in *Mad Soprano*, it's a little less clear in how the first section ends. She just kind of melds into singing various arias and excerpts. But anyway, that's kind of how the Anticipation section goes.

And then a motif usually appears in the music to indicate that she [the character] will start something new. So then it goes into what we always call the Prattle section. [Bill sings a little prattle from *Miriam*] But it's the same kind of thing—the character just prattles on and we just call it the Prattle section. Every piece I've written does this: it has the Anticipation and then the Event, and the first part of the Event is the Prattle section. And then there's usually a more reflective interlude as the prattling settles down. Then she picks up the trombone. In *Miriam*, she does her prattle and then it ends and she's thinking about what to do next: "Maybe, a melodrama." So it's the Prattle, sometimes a reflective interlude, and then the Trombone &Voice section, which is the big frenetic climax in the middle of the piece. In *Winnie,* she keeps playing the trombone faster and faster until it catches on fire. In *Miriam,* she finally screams through the trombone. In *Mad Soprano,* she plays and then concludes in a more low key way.

And then there's this third part called Reflection. And it's usually in about nine sub-sections. In theater, they use the term "beats." Like there's a theatrical beat, and it's basically sort of like a paragraph where the character will take some particular topic and talk about it. Like in *Winnie*, she'll pick up her music box and sing about her music box, and that's a beat. Or in *Miriam*, she'll write on her hands till they bleed—that's a beat. So the last section—the Reflection—is usually about nine or ten beats with different themes. And, sort of 2/3 of the way through the reflection section, there's usually a beat that starts getting more intense, crescendoing, and then there's a beat where it gets blown out into this big thing. Like in *Miriam*, when she screams those "I love you's." So we usually have this final cathartic climax about 2/3 of the way through the Reflection. And the last part is where the piece usually just fades away to nothing. In this resolution, Miriam is

obsessed that she'll find the words, and she puts on her mask. And it's this indication that words are always a kind of mask, especially if someone is oppressed.

J: Do you ever vary your formal structure?

B: So, we always start with that—Anticipation, Event, Reflection—for the structure of our works. And we try to formulate a character around that structure. So all of the pieces follow that structure, but often I find that in order to make a piece more interesting, I can take that structure and break it up and rearrange the pieces, so I sometimes do that. Especially with the *Mad Soprano*, I was just really wanting to try things new. I worked in all those arias that she sings and it ended up being a kind of very different structure because it's in two clear parts where: "Tonight, Betty will be beaten." and it goes dark, and there's kind of a time ellipse. And the light comes back up and she's been beaten and has blood on her hands and mouth. I didn't do that in any other piece, where there are those clear sections like with the stage going dark. So, I would sometimes vary the structure like that.

J: How do you and Abbie work together?

B: So, that then leads how we work together to conceptualize our pieces. Because with *Miriam*, I basically created it entirely by myself. But I never liked working with just my own words. I like the idea that there will be other elements coming in. So in *Miriam*, I was having trouble with some of the theatrical beats in the Reflection section. So, Abbie and I were taking a walk, and she just started riffing, "Well you could do this, or this, etc." Like the squeaking of the gum-sole shoes and the swinging of the hospital door—it was just such great imagery! And I had a pad of paper and started writing down what she was just riffing. And I realized that she had this great gift and poetic sensibility. And this

was before she started writing her own poetry—years before. And so I kept that in mind. Then I went on to the *Mad Soprano,* and wrote that text almost entirely myself, but I remembered how Abbie had helped me, so I asked her to write some text, and she wrote this poem: "These pitiful words, careening out of heart or gut…" And I used that. So by the time we got to *Cybeline*, I just wanted Abbie to write the text. And we spent a long time trying to figure out what the piece would be. So Abbie put these sketches on paper, but she never completed it. Abbie rarely sits down and just completes projects—she just doesn't work that way, but she wrote a lot of material using this concept of structure, and I arranged the material. That's the libretto for *Cybeline*.

So with *Aletheia,* we developed yet another concept of how to work together. We conceptualized the character, and then I worked out an outline like this of more or less what all the theatrical beats would be. And then I asked Abbie to write poems that would fit the concepts of those beats. And then I took the poems and began adapting them to the structure. I had to do various things like sometimes I would have to cut out a few lines or rhythmatize the lines. In 2009 we did a tour of the West Coast with *Cybeline* and it ended in late April. We decided I would just stay here and work on the house, and Abbie went back to Germany to finish her spring semester. So over the fall we would discuss the piece [*Aletheia*], and I would tell her what type of concept to work with, and she would email me a poem. She almost worked better being by herself. So I got a lot of material that way, and we went through all sorts of attempts to try and organize it. Different concepts, different names for the character, and finally some months later I got all of those poems organized into the text for *Aletheia*.

So that's kind of the evolution of how we work. Starting with Beckett—just gleaning out passages from Beckett. Like with *Happy Days*, I just took sections out of the play and composed the music. I didn't know this kind of structure existed. After I completed *Winnie*, I noticed that's how it worked. Then I modeled *Miriam* after *Winnie* because I was trying to learn how to write text. And then in *Mad Soprano*, I became more vague and subjective. And with *Cybeline* I tried a lot of things with video. With *Aletheia*, I went back to the original *Winnie* format. But when I completed it, I realized it was boring. The sections were too long, so I put it in the vegetable blender and chopped up the pieces and rearranged them. That's one of the things I learned early on with *Miriam* and *Mad Soprano*: to take one long theatrical beat and chop it in two, and then have her come back to the second theatrical beat later—it kind of ties it all together and integrates things a lot more. So that's what I did. We were working very intensely on *Aletheia* all through March during Abbie's spring break. By the end of the month I realized that I needed to put it in the Vegematic. So all of April, May and June I chopped up the piece and rearranged it, and now it flows much better.

J: Do you think that it was the extreme length of the work that wouldn't allow it to have that same structure? Because *Aletheia* is your longest piece, right?

B: Possibly. I even broke the Prattle up. Even some of the beats were too long. The basic Anticipation, Event, Reflection is still there, but we chopped up and shortened the beats instead of getting rid of the material and had her come back to the material.

One of the things that I noticed was wrong with *Cybeline* is that it didn't breathe…there was never any let up in the intensity, and so it would lose intensity. You need to relax and build intensity, relax and build intensity. So in *Aletheia*, there were places where I just

stopped the music and had her reflect. I would write some reflective music that was text-less. So that is another way that we varied the Anticipation, Event, and Reflection structure, and how we evolved with these pieces and how we finally found a method of working together.

J: Can you tell me how Samuel Beckett influenced your style? What drew you to his work?

B: Well when we first moved to Munich we lived across the street from the main hall of the university. Just around the corner was an English bookstore, and we would just drop into that bookstore and look around. We were very urban. We had just spent two years living on Broadway—we just wanted to be in the middle of things. So I was browsing through that bookstore, and I found a copy of *Waiting for Godot*—I didn't know anything about Beckett. But I was just looking at the language and noticing how musical it was. It had this kind of poetic rhythm, so I bought the play. This bass clarinetist had asked me to write this piece for her. She was a dancer—very narcissistic. And anything she could do to show off her beauty on stage, she would want to do. So I was maybe going to write a piece for dancing bass clarinetist—Stockhausen did that, so the idea was in the air. But it just didn't spark me. I realized that I could take this text [Beckett's] and write a music theatre piece: a singing, talking, acting, dancing bass clarinetist. I named it after the character in the play: Vladimir. I didn't send that piece to you for two reasons: it's not for Abbie, and second, it's not a very good piece—it was the very first chamber music theater piece I wrote.

A: I wouldn't take that too seriously. It's actually a very nice piece. It would actually work for trombone.

B: It would work better for trombone. Anyway, I wrote that. It wasn't a structural element or even a philosophical element that drew me to Beckett. It was just the musicality of his language.

J: There are no superfluous or flowery words in his writings.

A: It's somehow gorgeous and has this incredible resonance. It speaks.

B: It's so natural and musical, and it became one of ideals—to write this kind of prose that is extremely musical without posing. And so, I just *really* got into Beckett. I bought a tri-lingual version of his complete works up to about 1975 or something. He wrote a few minimalist works after that in the 80s. It was in English, German, and French. And the next piece that caught my eye from this complete version of his works was Hamm from *Endgame*. And I wrote this piece for acting violinist based on *Endgame*. I still didn't really have this idea that I would turn Abbie into this performance artist, personally. I was really just exploring on my own. By chance I found this violinist who was just and incredible actor and extremely extroverted. And he just killed people with that piece. It was just 17 minutes—a short work, and by some miracle, I got a fairly good recording of it. We performed it at a sort of festival concert that the Bavarian State recorded, and I got a copy of the recording… It also sort of follows that Anticipation, Event, Reflection structure, but I hadn't written *Winnie* yet, so I hadn't discovered that yet. But then again it was the musical language, the conciseness, and then there were a lot of existential things that I liked in Beckett's philosophy…his cynical view of human relationships, and the sense that this kind of hidden compassion was always behind the cynicism. And, his works always had this kind of complete circular structure that I always liked. Another thing that made his text so musical was that he wrote a lot of silences. He would just

write “long pause” or “short pause” as stage directions in his text. He once said that silence flows into his plays like water into a sinking ship. And basically what I discovered is that water can be music—that music could flow in between the words into all of the silences created by his words. And that’s what I really discovered with Hamm in *Endgame*, and then it’s just really obvious in *Winnie*. She’s just talking, talking, all about herself in this empty desert and Willie never says a word. She’ll talk and talk and then say, “Willie?” and hear nothing, just silence. Or she’ll come to the end of beat and say, “And now? And what now?” and there are just these silences. And so in my later works I never completely captured that existential sense of silence that Beckett did, but it also wasn’t so much one of our goals. But it was the silences that partly made his works so musical.

A: And of course, silence *à la* John Cage can also be considered musical.

B: You know, Michelangelo famously said that when he looked at a block of marble, he would see the sculpture in it. It was like he would have to release the sculpture from the marble. And that’s kind of what it’s like setting Beckett’s words—you’re just releasing the music that’s in them. And it’s the sense of varied rhythm, the sounds of words he liked—the way words sounded, and then those pauses—the implications of the music still going, and you could actually write in that music. You can notate the rhythm of his words because it was so carefully thought out. So spoken passages could be written out in a rhythmic notation.

J: Do you know of any other composers who set Beckett to music?

B: There are quite a few other composers who set Beckett, but I don’t really know their works. And the ones that I have heard—I don’t really think they understood Beckett’s

language. Especially Morten Feldman; he had a piece…he was just using Beckett for his own minimalist Northeastern establishment…I don't think he really understood Beckett that well.

A: I think that Bill's music so honors the text…it's almost easy to overlook it as music. The text is almost "ignited" by the music. And so it takes a back seat in a sense that it…well if you know anything about music theater or words and music, you get it. If you go to an opera, music can be just so present. It's almost "extroverted," and that is a problem with opera. In opera, the words are almost aside the point—just something to say. In a lot of stories the libretti are just kind of ...dumb. It's a form for the singer. The philosophy is so different looking back to the Florentine Camerata. But that's what they were trying to do—it was just a noble attempt. If you listen to those early operas, you get what they were trying to do, but they're lacking something. And we really tried, and failed, and tried, and failed harder—or "failed better" as Beckett would say—to really integrate words and music. So, going back to what I originally said about Bill's music being almost not background….but in order for music to honor words properly, it needs to ignite them and resonate in them. It has to be very carefully constructed and thought out, and that's how it can sometimes be easy to overlook his music.

B: I think it was in 1986, or maybe early 1987 when I met Beckett. I had written all of these pieces of his texts set to music, and I thought that he might like to see them. So I sent them to his place after a friend of a friend in Germany gave me Beckett's address. I took a big stack of scores and stuffed them directly into his mailbox…assuming that I might never hear anything from him. After a few weeks, I had totally forgotten about them. But then I got a card in an envelope with a short letter in the mail. The writing was

terrible and I couldn't figure out what it said. I was about to throw it away until I saw the signature at the bottom. It said "Samuel Beckett." So I made a big effort to try and decipher what it said. He said that he was impressed with my work and its execution…you know, no word is ever an accident with him. He didn't like how *Hamm* was being shouted and done so forcefully. But he was impressed with the form and said that if I was ever in Paris that he would like to meet me. So, naturally I found a reason to go to Paris. We actually met and talked for an hour. He didn't really like interacting with people and didn't like changes to be made to his works. So I was talking to him about this setting and he said that the music always wins. In opera, the music is always superior to the text. And so I told him that I was trying to create a music theater where the music didn't win. And that's pretty much true with *Winnie* and my other settings of his works. They all use very thin, simple accompaniments that bring out the musicality of his words. And that's why he was so interested in my work—you know, he would always think so carefully about the rhythms of the words. And when he would direct people, he would insist that they say the words with a certain rhythm, and it was a very tedious process because he couldn't notate the rhythms of those words, and I kind of invented a way of doing that and built these pieces around the rhythmic nature of his words. But at that point he was very old. So that's related to what Abbie said about honoring the text and not letting the music win. We've always wanted to create a balance between the text and music, which was outlined by the Florentine Camerata—an integration of words and music that was equal.

A: And it takes a certain…well you have to submit to the text. You can't have a big ego about your music. You have to see the big picture—the whole thing that you want to

create. And it kind of depends on what your philosophy of music is and what its job is in the world.

B: There are a few operas that I feel the words and music have a good marriage. All those Du Ponte texts for Mozart…the texts aren't great literature, but they are such good vehicles for Mozart's genius. They work so well because they are carefully crafted. They use stock characters based on *commedia dell' arte*, and they form a very good structure for the music as well. The two Boito adaptations of Shakespeare that he made of Verdi's last two operas: *Falstaff* and *Otello*—those are examples where the words and the music really work together well. But generally it doesn't, and it's just silly words for silly music.

A: Well you can hardly beat Shakespeare…certainly Beckett was deeply into Shakespeare.

B: Now Boito was an opera composer himself, so he really had a deep sense of the musicality of the language and the special musical structure that had to be created through the words. And that's what we really discovered…something like 70% of the composing is done by writing the words. So *Aletheia* just flowed out really quickly because I had so carefully worked out the rhythms of the words. It has very song-like theatrical beats, so it composed very easily. But then when I had it all done, I realized that I needed to re-structure it to gain the right sense of musical rhythm and flow.

J: Abbie, when did you discover that you had a theatrical impulse in yourself?

A: Well that's always kind of a gradual thing. At my high school at the Arts Academy, they hosted a skit night. I had no idea what that was, and they said that you just write a skit and present it, and there was going to be a prize of $100. I just couldn't forget it. I

mean, I was just a trombonist—my identity. But I couldn't forget it, so I just kind of improvised this sketch. It was very minimal. I had actually seen some Beckett productions at my high school, so probably at the back of my mind was minimal sensibility. So I presented it at skit night with three other friends, and it actually created quite a sensation. What might interest you is that the skit night was right after my orchestra concert, and I was playing first of Brahms' First Symphony. And usually when you play Brahms' First you're like, "Gee, I can't miss that A!" But for me all I could think about was after the concert—skit night. Well, I didn't win, but that's beside the point. I didn't really do anything like that again until we were living in Philadelphia where I was studying at Temple University and Bill was studying privately with Crumb. Bill was the super at this row house and he had to go up into the attic for some reason. He had me come up there because he had found a frock—a set of tails—that were completely preserved from the 1920s. So this set of tails fit me like a glove, and I had been exposed to the Berio *Sequenza* when I was at the University of New Mexico—it was the first thing my teacher played for me. And so the Berio was my first chance to really mix theater and trombone playing.

B: We worked very closely on that piece.

A: Bill was just amazing. Being a composer, he could just look at the piece and pick out the phrases. He had the language to really analyze it, which was really helpful. I had also taken a pantomime course as an elective at the University of New Mexico, so I understood the concept of having a "clean slate." If the body is very plain, then any gesture you make is very articulated. People seemed to really respond to my performances of the Berio.

B: It was a step, but we still had no idea what we were doing…

A: But we had the sense to integrate everything. Most people perform it…people just make it hammy by putting makeup on and doing this and that. But the music is so great—the theater should be great, too! If you look at the piece, it's a bit problematic. If you know anything about the history of the piece you know that it was commissioned by Stewert Dempster, but the person who ended up premiering it was Vinko Globokar in Europe, and he did the first recording, too. It's kind of bipolar because it starts out in the character of Stewart Dempster—this kind of impish clown character, and then when you get to the B section, it's very Globokar. So when I worked on it, I noticed this integration problem. And each person needs to work that out in their own mind when they play that piece…because it starts out theatrically with gesture, and then that goes away.

B: Abbie entered a competition in 1980 or 1982, and one of the options was to play Berio's *Sequenza.* She had worked really hard at that piece, and by that point I had already written *Vladimir* and *Hamm,* so we kind of already knew that we were going in the direction of theater. In college I was really interested in opera and wanted to be an opera composer, but then realized that it was a wild dream. And even then I saw opera as a kind of dead genre. To be practical we sort of developed this idea of chamber music theater to solve these problems.

A: When I entered that trombone competition and played the Berio, none of the trombonists on the jury could even read the music! It was ridiculous how they were joking around about it—holding the music upside down and trying to read it. It was primitive, excuse me, but it was. I don't think anyone else chose the Berio—no one else played it. So maybe you could say I was ahead of my time. And certainly no woman had

ever attempted to play it, but it was just one of those steps along the way. For most trombonists I think that piece is the first movement towards more integrated playing. Now, there are more pieces out there that attempt to use more elements.

B: I finished *Winnie* in February of 1983…

A: But that's when you were thinking that I would play the trombone part—that I would be Willie and a soprano would sing Winnie's role. That's how he conceived it.

B: But then I changed my mind and decided that the trombonist would do all of it. So we started working on it, and it was just *hopeless.* First, I didn't really have a good concept of the human voice. I wrote it in a sort of *coloratura* style. That was before I had taken Alexander Technique lessons. I had really bad posture, and it actually affected my voice.

J: So, how do you go about forming your various characters?

B: Once I started writing my own text…I never matched up to the standard of Beckett—I mean, who could? And for one thing, my characters didn't have as much personality. I mean Winnie has so much more personality than Miriam. And so Miriam becomes more of an abstract statement about ideas and whereas Winnie has this whole personality.

A: On the other hand, I find that Miriam has the quality of an archetype that you rank and wrench up out of your unconscious. She is more of a Dante-esque figure in her form. So I think you're being a little too judgmental, Bill. Miriam has some powerful emotional charge on her.

B: You know, Miriam is not in a very humorous circumstance where she can show a lot of idiosyncrasies. The Mad Soprano, to me, has a little bit more personality. She is kind of neurotic, bunching the scarf around her throat. She is enthusiastic and shares her secret

gossip about Betty, so she has a little bit more personality. Then Cybeline I feel has very little personality, and with Aletheia we were trying to bring the personality back in.

J: How would you describe the "creative identity of women?"

B: I feel that Beckett was a bit of a misogynist. And I think that in some ways Winnie is making fun of feminine identity, and yet Beckett always had two sides. What makes his works so great is that he could honor somebody at the same time as making fun of them. And he could just show so much about human folly, and so there was always compassion in it, and so he could make fun of Winnie and yet at the same time, portray Winnie's indomitable spirit. Beckett wanted to write existential works, which meant they had to have this universal meaning, so if he wrote anything too political, then it limited the universal message. So instead of wanting to write social commentary like Brecht, he wanted to write things that dealt with the fundamental qualities of being a human, regardless of what political system he was dealing with. By 1987, when I started writing *Miriam*, our minds were on feminist themes because Abbie had already spent six years in that orchestra [Munich Philharmonic], facing some of the most stupid, backward treatment. I thought it would be very relevant with the women's movement, and that there would be a lot of support for it [*Miriam*], but that turned out not to be true in Germany. Germany was just utterly backward, and doing anything feminist was just met with resentment. And that is still true. There were all of these women cultural houses, so I thought that we might be able to perform there, but there was so much anti-Americanism and anti-feminist sensibilities—there was just no support. But we just dove in and broke from Beckett [with *Miriam*] and did something political that dealt with some of the most basic elements of consciousness.

There was this book that was popular in the 70s that dealt with the identity of women and language—I can't remember the book. But the thesis of the book was that the very nature of language itself is patriarchal and that the evolution of language over the millenniums has always been oriented around the male perspective. I thought that was a really interesting existential theme. So we had the idea to write a piece in which a woman was trying to compose a music theater work and discovers that she has no language of her own to express herself. It's like the trombone. Who explores the feminine nature of the trombone? We [society] have this "big bore," "big sound" concept of what the instrument is. What ever happened to the small bore trombone? Why is that relegated only to jazz? So much of the literature was originally written for the small bore trombone. Who developed the concept that it had to be this "big bore" thing? It's somewhat Germanic, but the German players in the 19th century weren't playing big bore instruments at all—why do we assume they were? What about Ravel's *Bolero*? Why is it played on big instruments when Ravel clearly had the sound of someone like Tommy Dorsey in his mind? You can carry that idea over to just about every area of our society—this phallocentric, patriarchal culture. And so that's the concept that we explored, and that leads right back to the creative identity of women— that they don't have a language.

A: You have to develop it [a language] yourself in order to have it deeply connected to you. And so you have this alienated language that you try to express something that cannot be expressed through a patriarchal language. So there is an incredible future for women in that sense.

B: That's basically the central idea of all of our works. *Miriam* dealt with it in this very abstract, existential way—well there was no language at all that wasn't patriarchal. And

then *Mad Soprano* narrows it down to the fact that women are degraded in opera in how they are portrayed. It's a patriarchal perspective. That piece was inspired by a book, Clement's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women.* And then in *Cybeline* we explored the idea that technology has a male orientation—science and engineering are dominated by men. There was an article by Donna Harroway, "The Cyborg Manifesto," and she argued that women would benefit from cyborgian powers because they could then be like men—gendering becoming irrelevant. I just really fundamentally disagreed with the article. I didn't think technology was creating a new feminism. I just thought it was creating a new masculinism, and that all you had to do was look around the science world to see that. And the very idea that somehow the "mechanization of the body" or the "programmability of the body" as a means of liberating women was just an expression of contempt for women. And so that's what *Cybeline* is about. Maybe I'll start liking that work one day…

A: Regardless of what we think about it now…maybe we don't have the perspective to see it clearly, but I think that *Cybeline* was a noble attempt to express something about women and technology.

B: The system in America with the arts being supported by wealthy people is a kind of "neo-feudalism," and feudalism is the very essence of patriarchy.

J: Do you think that the discrimination you faced helped you to be better equipped to play these roles and to really get into character?

A: For sure.

B: Even in the early Beckett works like *Act Without Words,* the concept of tantalism is explored—the Gods offer up things only to take them away. Anything Abbie tried to

accomplish professionally, they would try to take away from. So we were always striving for unattainable goals because some people were just interfering with the process. And then Winnie trying to stay optimistic, despite the fact that she is sinking into the earth up to her neck…You know we would try to keep up our vision of hope and optimism and appreciation of classical music and all that, so it's related. And Miriam was just a direct response. It's not that it just helped her perform the piece, it was the very essence of why the piece was created. We just began to realize in what a stupid world we were. We feel that more than ever now, and that's what *Aletheia* is about—just someone who finally decides to step totally outside all of the established practices—to just reject it and not do it. You know, a much more calculated person would say, "I don't reject modern musical establishments, I just don't want to be bound by them." But we're just much more honest about it. The fact is, Abbie has a very close relationship with the musical establishment than most—she was in the Munich Philharmonic, she made a CD of standard pieces, she has a standard technique of playing the trombone, but we reject the classical music world. It's like we discussed in some of our emails—grown men in formal attire who play the stupidest pieces imaginable with a straight face…

A: And everybody goes crazy.

B: And we all worship that. The issue has nothing to do with art but simply how well they manipulate this machine. And what is the point in that? If you're not going to say something [composers and musicians], then just be quiet.

A: They use the trombone as an instrument of self-gratification. Real music is about transcendence. It is about getting over yourself and meeting the bigger picture as much as you can. This whole sense of submitting to what music is and what that takes as opposed

to "instrumentalizing" it and using music to promote your own sense of self, your own ego. I don't want to have anything to do with that. That's an extreme position to some, but in my opinion it's not extreme—that's just how it is. So you end up seeming extreme because everyone else is like, "what are you doing?"

B: So how do you manage living in the wasteland? That becomes the big question. Jessy, in our conversations, I always have this huge doubt hanging over me. Like, should I ever encourage somebody to go into that wasteland? Should I tell a young trombonist that most of their literature is stupid? Because how are they going to develop as an artist if they think that their literature is stupid? That's one side of it. The other side is: how can they possibly develop as an artist if they didn't know that their literature was stupid? And so you look at some of these big orchestral players, and they're just the embodiment of stupidity. Is it responsible to tell a young trombonist that? I don't see how there's any way you cannot, but how can you expect that young artist to proceed from there? There are a couple of trombonists who took that approach, and they were professors, and one of them faced a lot of trouble for it. Vinko Globokar refused to play any transcriptions or French recital music, and he didn't get any students, so he lost his professorship.

A: You know, I don't really like using the word "patriarchal." It can kind of put people on edge, and maybe puts them in a defensive position if they haven't really thought about these issues very much. When you start really thinking about the effects of it on the whole system of our whole world…You are in the wasteland. You're there. It permeates everything, and sometimes it's almost impossible to see another way to be. Through doing what we do and trying to live another paradigm, it's hard.

B: One of the things that led us to think this way and to compose *Miriam* was seeing how the authoritative hierarchies of an orchestra could be abused. And then wondering: are they being abused, or is this just the way orchestras are? This conductor Celbidache [Munich Philharmonic] was just a lunatic. He would say and do outrageous things. The more he abused the Germans, the more that they would worship him.

A: He would use Nazi vocabulary—words that Germans wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole for 40 years.

B: By the 90s, we could formulate what was wrong with the wasteland. It's clear in the *Mad Soprano*.

A: There are a couple of details that stand out for me. Two things: the male rights movement of Nazism—and yes, there was a male rights movement—they thought the feminine was too predominant in German culture and that wasn't right, which was of course nonsense. And the other thing was personally experiencing pure hatred because I was a feminine being. Just to experience that viscerally…I think a lot of women experience it at an unconscious level and they're constantly hiding it from themselves because it's so *painful* [italics added by author] to be hated because you're a woman. But it is *everywhere* [italics added by author] if you have eyes to see it. And I think that Bill is so unique because he got this—I mean, ever since I've known him, he has so gotten this. And perhaps part of it is because he is an artistic personality, and you could say that the artistic sensibility is "feminine"—the *anima* as opposed to the *animus.* So anything that crushes creativity is in a sense "anti-woman." Those were two things that I noticed. And at the time I didn't get it. I wasn't a feminist—I was a trombone player. I played the best, and I got the job, but then there was all of this other stuff. And it took many years before

I realized it wasn't about me as a player—it was about me as a woman. It really did take quite a while to penetrate, and it wasn't until the 90s where I started to get some sense of it. The first International Women's Brass Conference happened in 1993, and I was invited—the timing was incredible. I was about to leave the Munich Philharmonic, and I was in a position to bargain to get let off one of my last concerts in order to go and be a guest artist in St. Louis at the IWBC. It was just incredible—the feeling was ecstatic. People were jumping up and down inside themselves.

B: It was a huge revelation for us because we had premiered *Miriam: The Chair* in 1988 in Stuttgart, and we got heckled. It was an all-male audience, and it created this indelible memory in my brain. After Abbie's performance, they booed her. I had no idea that it was going to cause that kind of reaction because I still had this American-centric mentality that there would be a lot of support for a feminist impulse, and it just wasn't there…So when we were invited to the first IWBC, we for some reason decided to perform *Miriam: The Chair*, and the reaction was just *incredible* [italics added by author]. And finally that whole vision we had that women interested in feminist themes would support us came alive. And they were not only feminists, they were brass players! It was just like putting a match in a barrel of gasoline. The reaction was amazing because when Abbie finished, it was completely silent.

A: I thought that I had completely failed. I even started to cry as I was bowing because I thought that they just didn't get it. I was literally weeping.

B: They were silent, and then they started to stand up. It was the most amazing thing. That was a major turning point in our lives because we were totally oriented to being in Europe and performing in state theaters in Europe. So we just stopped doing that and

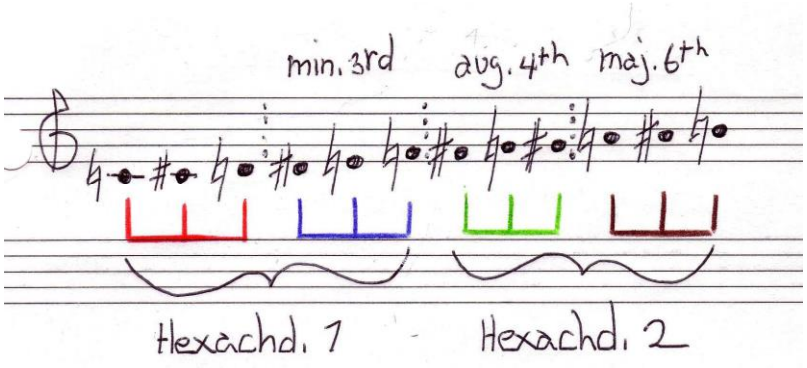
started touring in the States because we had so much more support…We had already been in Europe for 14 years, so America seemed like this exotic, exciting place. I was surprised at how many invitations we got. At first it was 5 or 6, and then later it was up to 15 or 16. By this next spring, we will have been touring for 20 years. And now we're starting to look for new directions. In some ways we have this longing to go back to Europe, but we know that we'd face the same stupid resentment.

APPENDIX B

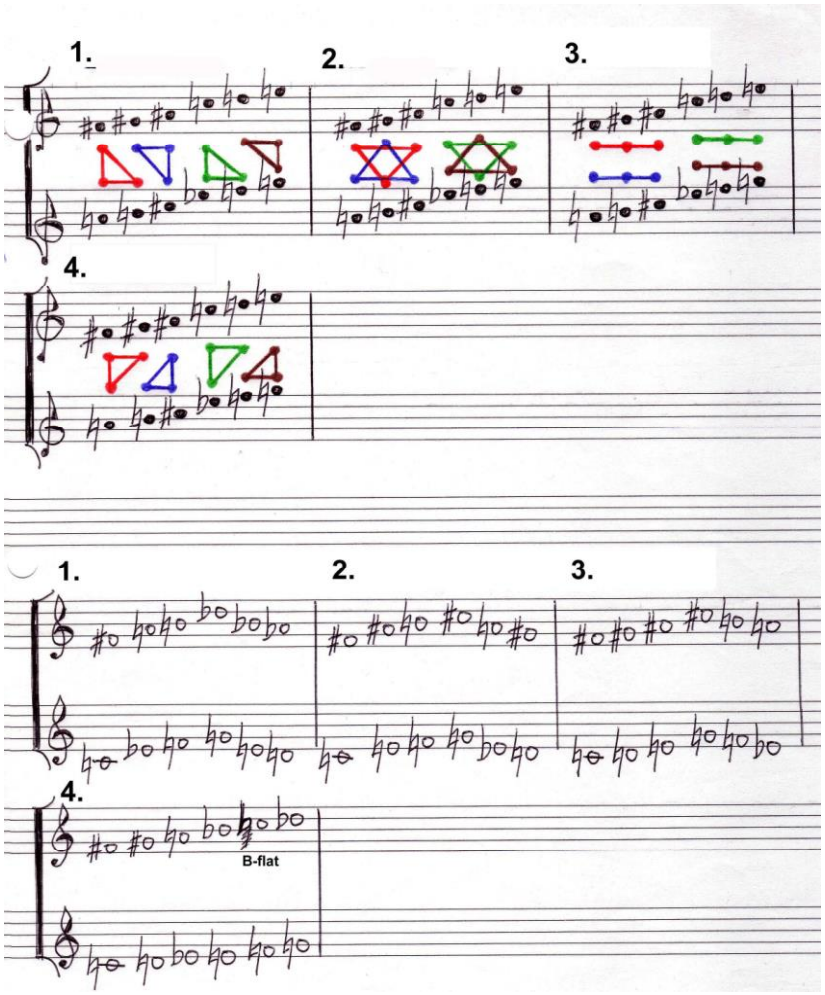
WILLIAM OSBORNE'S "CELL THEORY"

As used in *Winnie, Miriam: The Chair*, and *Street Scene for the Last Mad Soprano*, emailed to Jessica Ducharme April 16, 2012.

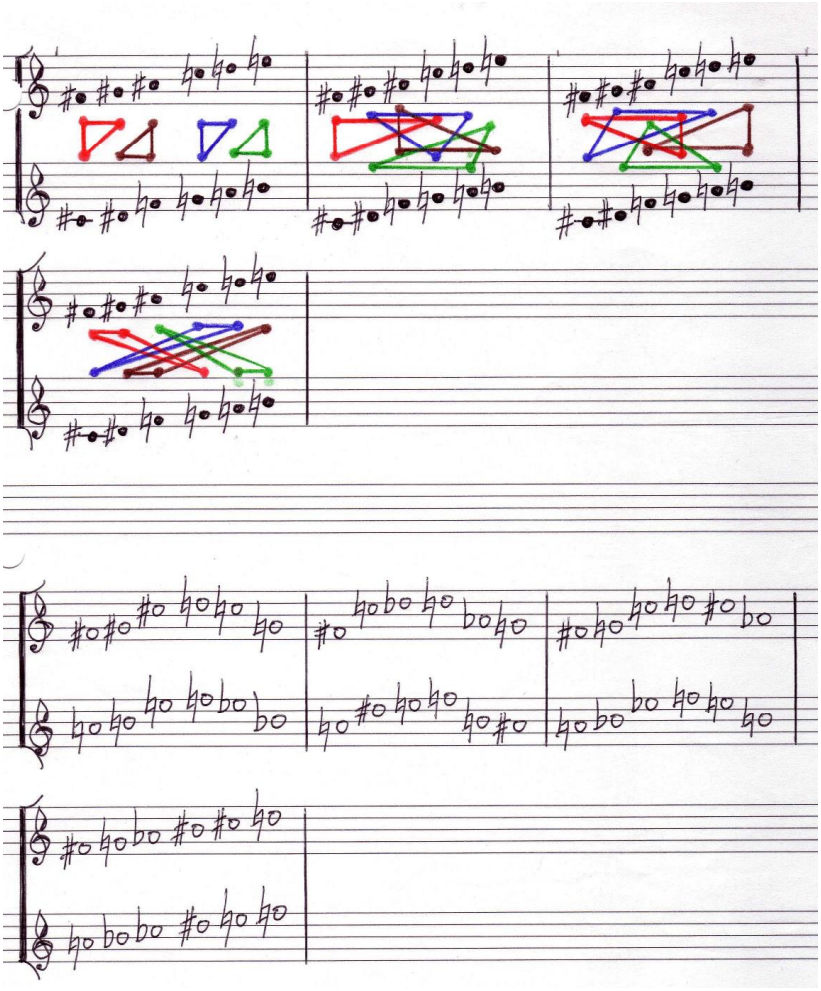
A combinatorial cell is three notes that when transposed can produce all 12 notes of the octave. For example, a cell made of three half steps like C-C#-D, can be transposed up a minor third, an augmented fourth, and major 6th to produce all 12 notes, as in the diagram below:



The diagram below shows how I derive combinatorial cells. I found that if I line up two whole tone scales a minor third apart (one starting on F# and one on A-natural as in the diagram) I could draw triangular patterns between them to produce more combinatorial cells. Not any triangle will do. They must be the same shape and mirror images of each other. For example, you can look at the red triangle in number 1, and then see the notes it outlines written out in the third staff in the diagram. The blue triangle (which is the same shape and mirror image) makes the other three notes to form a hexachord. Numbers 2 through 4 show how different shaped triangles produce different cells/hexachords.



I found that if I put the two whole tone scales an augmented fourth apart as in the diagram below (one starting on F# and the other on C) I could produce further combinatorial cells. As always, the scales must be the same shape and mirror images of each other. The cells are written out in the corresponding measures of the third and fourth staffs.



I think of these cells/hexachords as "crystals" because of the way they interlock. All my music theater works are mono-dramas performed by Abbie. For each work, I select a single type of cell to use, which I think of as the DNA of the character.

I also found that I could mutate the cells by symmetrically exchanging its notes with its mirror cell in the hexachord as shown in the numbers enclosed in the red box below. For example, the 135-624 in the first column is transformed to 145-623 in the second column by having 3 and the 4 exchange sides in the hexachord. And in the third column 2 and 5 exchange sides.

In addition, the order of the notes in each three note cell can be permutated. For example, in the first column we see the permutations of 135, 153, 351, 513, 531. And the same for 624, and so on. So the hexachords can exchanges notes between their cells, and each of those cells can mutate their order.

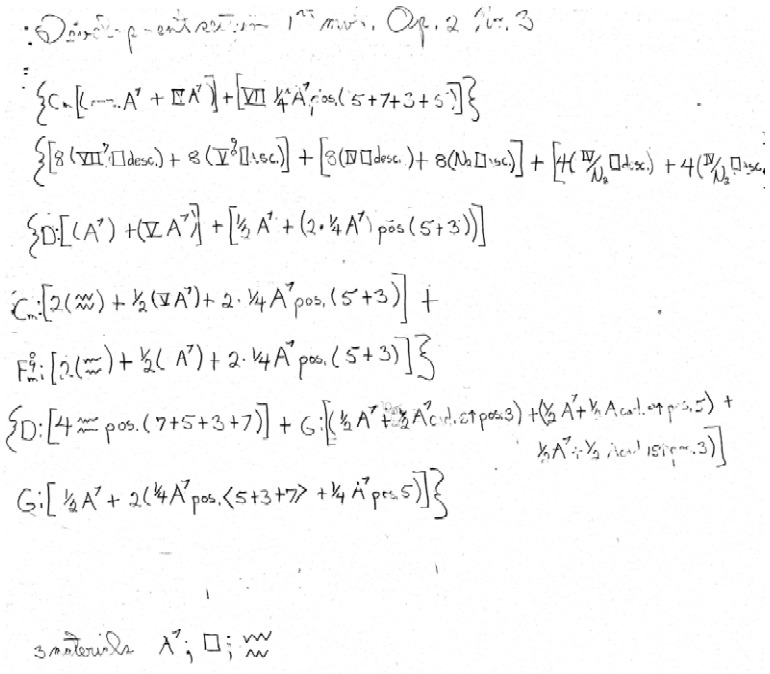
each cell has six permutations, and each of the hexachords those cells produce can symmetrically exchange notes. The chart below shows how one six notes combinatorial hexachord and produce 18 permutations – or mutations to continue the biological analogy And of course, those 18 hexachords each have 12 transpositions in an octave, so the "genetically unified" material they produce is very extensive and can be used to create a character.

135-624	145-632	124-653
153-642	154-623	142-635
351-246	451-326	241-536
315-264	415-362	214-563
513-462	514-263	412-365
531-426	541-236	421-356

So that's my cell theory in a nutshell. I'm sure you're utterly confused. We could go over it this summer and it would be a lot easier to make clear. I could also show you how the cells appear in the music and play examples.

Another even more idiosyncratic technique I use is that I have developed a way of notating the structure of sonata allegro form using something like algebraic formulas. Below are the formulas for Beethoven's Op. 2. No. 3 (a piano sonata.) I sometimes use these formulas in our theater works, such as for the "overture" of Street Scene. It is a

kind of sonata allegro form but played by sirens. Aletheia makes extensive use of th technique through out the work. Perhaps we can go over this someday if you write dissertation about our work. It is difficult to explain in text, but easy to demonstrate person. I developed this method when Abbie and I were students. We also used it t write some solo trombone works and Music for the End of Time. Anyway, here are examples of the formulas. I create the genetic material with the cells, and give them with these formulas.



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