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FIVE MILES OUTSIDE TOWN:

A PLAY WITH MUSIC

Luke John McLoughlin

122 Pages

Months ago, I wanted to write something like an opera or a musical for my thesis. This is not quite what happened. Instead, I have written a play with music; that is, there are four solo songs interspersed within the drama. While there are parts of it that I would like to change, the present work (the pages following this abstract, the title page, the copyright page, the committee page, the acknowledgments page, and the table of contents) represents what I was able to put together within the restrictions of the academic schedule.

The following are descriptions of various facets of the work. The songs are for two men and two women. In addition, there is a short prelude and postlude for the chamber ensemble alone. The words, the music, and the plot are far more important than the showcasing of the human voice. Indeed, the style of vocal writing is quite declamatory. The songs are linked by motives—both melodic and harmonic.

Though the prelude and the postlude function as a unit separate from the songs, they are linked in that the postlude develops a central motive first heard in Kate's song. The prelude is meant to situate the drama in musical terms. The postlude is meant to begin to resolve the dissonance of the previous songs (literally and figuratively), as well as express a sense of optimism and hope—the sort of thing Frank feels as he leaves to study philosophy; the sort of thing that (hopefully) one feels at the end of the work.

The chamber ensemble is comprised of nine instruments: flute, 2 clarinets, horn, euphonium, violin, viola, cello, and double bass. I deliberately avoided using piano. This posed a challenge, since so much of the harmonic material for this music involves chords with many notes. A piano (most often played by 1 person) can easily play music with many simultaneous voices and notes; this is inevitably more difficult to achieve with a chamber ensemble. Therefore, deciding upon a varied and balanced ensemble was difficult.

The relationship between the music and the drama might, without experiencing the work, seem strained; how can the music be integral to the work if there is so much text and so comparatively little music? The words do what music cannot—they express specific ideas. The music, on the other hand, does what it does so well—it makes the expressions of emotion more complex. The songs allow us into the inner worlds of the four main characters. The music illuminates the emotions of the words. In this way, the music adds a dimension to the overall work unattainable through the text or the action on stage alone.

The script began to take shape much sooner than the music. This was, in part, because I was unsure of the musical language that I should use. I know how to write in a film music/post-Romantic/post-minimalist/pop. style. I have a sense of the typical structures of this music, since I have heard it all my life. But this language did not seem appropriate; and indeed, I want to break away from using these structures—the result sounds alright, but there are more beautiful things one could create. I wanted a way to relate the sounds I like very much—tertian structures, quartal harmonies, quintal harmonies, clusters—in a way that revitalized music that used such as these. Finally, I began to link these familiar structures using familiar concepts applied in atypical ways. One example would be a series of minor triads with roots linked by ascending fourth; another would be a series of minor triads with roots linked by minor third. While I did not exclusively

use such relationships, they did make many appearances in the score. Because I began using them so late in the compositional process, I did not use them as much as I would have liked. In the future, I hope to devise a way to create music with such principles as the basis for organizing harmony.

KEYWORDS: Play, Music, Songs, Chamber ensemble, Middle west, Stoicism.

FIVE MILES OUTSIDE TOWN: A PLAY WITH MUSIC

LUKE JOHN MCLOUGHLIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

School of Music

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2017

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FIVE MILES OUTSIDE TOWN: A PLAY WITH MUSIC

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. Magnuson, Dr. Schimmel, and Dr. Vickers; to Aaron Harris Woodstein; to my brother; to my parents:

thank you.

L. J. M.

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Five Miles Outside Town

Luke John McLoughlin

Cast (in order of appearance):
Man 1
Man 2
Man 3
Frank
Kate
Heather

Sam

Setting: five miles outside of a small town in the Middle-west of America

Time: the present; late summer, early fall

Lights up. A night sky; cloudy; some stars and the moon are visible. An asphalt, two-lane road enters from stage right and curves sharply just left of center stage. The road dips and then rises again, only to disappear over the horizon afterwards. Rows and rows of fully-grown corn stalks surround the road. Just over the horizon stage right, a cluster of red windmill lights blinks in unison.

Just beyond the curve in the road stands a massive old oak tree. The area of the trunk facing stage right is deformed and scarred, as if due to something large and forceful—like a speeding vehicle—smashing into it years ago. The corn surrounds the tree in a clearing—a ring a few feet wide all around the large, exposed roots. Nothing grows there; only the roots and dirt make up the clearing.

Downstage right is a higher piece of land—at the edge of a small wood—that gives a view of everything just described. Here is a log on its side—a place to sit.

[Music in: Prelude.]

[Music out.]

Man 1, Man 2, and Man 3 enter. Man 3 is struggling to carry a cooler. He brings it to the ground with a grunt.

Man 3:

Why couldn't we just drink in the parkin' lot, like we always do?

Man 1:

Can't see this clearin' from the parkin' lot and can't bring the truck here without causin' all sorts'a damage. I ain't even finished payin' for that truck, and you want me to bash it all to Hell for you?

Man 3:

Well, someone better drink all this beer, or I might kill both of you.

Man 2 (to Man 3):

Here, gimme one. Might as well start now.

Man 3 hands Man 2 a can of beer.

Lord knows I'll enjoy this much more if I'm liquored up.

Man 2 takes a drink and grimaces.

Why do we drink this shit?

Man 3:

It's cheap. Means you can get liquored up for less. Hey, that was pretty good!

Man 2:

Piss is cheap. Don't mean you should drink it.

Man 3:

You should know by now. The more you drink, the better the flavor; and *that's* 'cause the more you drink, the less you care. Shit, that was good, too! Like poetry or somethin'. And my parents say I need a college education. Bullshit! I got everything I need right here.

He points to his head.

Man 1 (*flatly*):

You're a genius.

Man 2 takes out a flask. He drinks from it with another grimace and then puts it away.

Man 2 (to Man 1):

Alright, come on. Tell me: why are we here?

Man 3:

To drink. We always come here to drink.

Man 2 (to Man 1):

No, why are we *really* here?

Man 1:

How many times have I told you the story?

Man 2:

Aw, I never listen, and I'm usually drunk when you tell it, so hur—

Man 1 (interrupts Man 2):

Shhh! (whisper): Keep your voice down!

Man 2 (*slightly louder than before*): Who's listening?! The trees?! The corn?!

Man 1:

Shhh! (whisper): Dammit! He'll hear you!

Man 3:

"He?" "He" who?

Man 1 (whisper):

The guy's ghost. From the story. The ghost that haunts that spot down there. *Man 2 and Man 3 look at each other and roll their eyes. Man 2 takes another pull from his flask.*

Man 1:

It went like this. A guy and his girl are comin' back from prom. Both are liquored up. He's drivin' and he takes this curve here way too fast. BAM!

Man 1 punches his fist into his hand. Man 2 and Man 3 jump.

Right into the tree. She dies instantly. Somehow, he's still alive.

Man 2:

Somehow . . .

Man 1 ignores him and continues.

Man 1:

He crawls from the wreckage, drags himself to the middle of the road over there, and writes, usin' his own blood—

He writes in the air with his index finger as he spells—

"H-E-L-P." "HELP," in all caps.

Well, the fire department comes, puts out the fire, and cleans up the mess. The families bury what's left of the bodies.

Man 3:

Under the tree?

Man 1:

Yes-

He realizes.

No! In the town cemetery.

Now, you'd think that after havin' a car smash into it and after bein' on fire, that tree would die. But it didn't! It's still alive today, and this happened years ago.

Man 2:

How many years ago?

Man 1:

I don't remember exactly. Many!

Anyway, the part of the trunk facin' the road is all messed up from the crash. You can see that in the moonlight.

Now, you'd think the ghosts would stay in the cemetery, but ghosts are tricky. They've got minds of their own--know what I mean?

Man 2 and Man 3 stare at Man 1. Pause.

Well, the farmer never could get anything to grow near the tree after that. No corn, no grass, no nothin'. There's this ring of nothin' around that tree, like the ground was poisoned; but that's not

They say some nights, you can see the pool of his blood in the middle of the road, with a body-sized space in it where he was lyin'; and "HELP" above that in all caps.

Pause.

Man 2:

When's this s'pposed to happen?

Man 1:

Always the same time, same time as the crash.

Man 2:

When?

Man 1:

Stroke of midnight.

Man 2:

And you believe this shit?!

Man 1:

Shhh!

Man 2:

Wait a damn minute! First of all, *of course* this tree here could survive a car crash. Trees do that, 'specially big ones. They get cut up, run into, lit on fire, and they *still* grow back. Happens all the time.

As for the clearing, look how big those branches are. Not a lotta light's gonna get to the ground, so not a lot's gonna grow there. Plus, those big roots ain't gonna help.

And hey, maybe the ground *actually is* poisoned. Maybe it's the pesticides; or maybe ol' Jim Heath keeps his land there bare for his own reasons.

Man 1:

Alright, egghead, how do you explain the stains on the road? *Man 2 looks*.

Man 2:

There ain't no stains on the road!

Man 1:

Of course there ain't. It ain't midnight, yet!

Man 3:

Look, maybe that tree trunk was just always messed up.

Man 1:

No! It was the crash! It was in the papers!

Man 3:

When? Which papers?

Man 1:

Dammit, I don't have them with me! I'll find them and show ya!

Man 2:

Alright, alright. Shhh. Fine.

Man 3:

Fine?

Man 2:

Yeah. Let's say this really does happen sometimes.

Man 3:

Says who?

Man 2 (indicates Man 1):

Says him.

Man 1:

It does, it does! You'll see. Now, you're talkin' sense.

Man 2:

But even if it does, even if you got pictures, that *still* don't prove *all* of this.

Man 1:

OF COURSE IT DOES!

Man 2:

Hold up, hear me out. There was this guy we went to high school with. Would just kinda stare at you quietly. Never looked happy. I was in English with him sophomore year. What was his name?

Man 3:

Frank?

Man 2 (to Man 3):

Yeah, Frank. That's right, you and me was in the same English class.

Man 3:

Yeah, I remember him. I don't think I ever heard him talk—not even in class.

Man 2:

I think he lives close to me. I always see him walkin' down my street. Few hours later, he comes back the other way. Still does this. I seen him last night, out for a walk. Didn't see him come back; I was probably asleep by then.

Pause.

Come to think of it, he's been doin' that almost every night, lately.

Man 1:

So what? So he's a weirdo. Always was, always will be. Probably thinks he's better than us. *We're* not *smart* enough for 'im.

Man 2:

My point is this. Just imagine a guy like Frank: has no friends, goes for walks for hours at a time. Let's say he comes to a place like this late at night. Even *he's* gotta know the stories. So, he gets himself some red paint and he does himself a little art project. Maybe he goes all the way, kills a rabbit, and uses the blood—something like that.

Man 3:

Why would Frank do that?

Man 2:

I don't think Frank did it. But I do think some other shithead did.

Man 1:

That don't make sense.

Man 2:

Makes more sense than your story.

Man 3:

I always thought he was the kind'a guy who could commit murder and get away with it. One'a them psycho people. You know, the kinda people who have no conscience—or whatever.

Shift focus. Frank is down stage center—in his room, writing.

Frank (*He reads*):

"Bachelor of Art in Philosophy, Application Supplement. Please answer the following three questions—no more than 1,000 words per response. Conciseness (or an attempt at the same) is greatly appreciated and encouraged. Question 1: detail the reason (or reasons) you first took an interest in philosophy." *He looks up. Pause*. Two reasons: to cope, to survive.

[Music in: Frank's Song.]

Frank:

Which is better: a community while not one's self or no community as one's truest self? Somewhere in the middle, ideally. Somewhere in the middle.

But for that to be, either I or the people of this town would have to be fundamentally other than ourselves.

We could not ask for that of each other.

Which is better: to speak or to keep silent? Somewhere in the middle, ideally. Somewhere in the middle, but to speak is to be misunderstood and maligned, which I suppose I could endure; but it saddens me to find out just how little we have to say to each other, just how little we can connect with each other.

But it will not always be so; no, it will not always be so.
I know they're out there: pursuers of knowledge, pursuers of perspective, all helping each other to find and to fuel their passions; and I will find them, I will find out where they are, and I will join them. After a lifetime of waiting, I will join them, and then, and then, and then.

Which is better: stability or connection with one's emotions? When everything is so profoundly disappointing, there is no middle ground.

Frank stares at the papers before him, and then begins writing earnestly.

[Music out.]

Shift back to Man 1, Man 2, and Man 3.

Man 3:

You know, that's not the story I heard. I heard it was a girl who crashed her father's truck into that tree. No one married her, so she got desperate and killed herself. You're s'pposed to see her, standin' in the middle of the road there, if you drive by at night.

Man 1: Sounds like a bunch'a crap, to me.

Man 2: Sounds a lot like Kate. Man 1: Kate?

Man 2:

You know, the old preacher's daughter. Holy rollin' Kate.

Man 1:

Oh yeah. Savin' herself for Jesus.

Man 3:

I went on a date with her once.

Man 2:

When was this?

Man 3:

Year after high school. We went to see a movie, and I put my arm around her. She moved closer, you know, and that was fine. But then, she grabbed my arm and threw it off her, like I tried to feel her up or somethin'.

Pause.

Man 1: Did you?

Man 3:

No, I swear. We were just sittin'. It was nice. But then, she did that and she told me not to do it again—like she was mad at me, like I'd done somethin' wrong. Said the devil works in mysterious ways.

Man 2 scoffs.

Man 1:

She's gonna be savin' herself for Jesus for a *long* time.

Man 3:

You seen her lately?

Man 1:

Nope.

Pause. Man 3 realizes.

Man 3:

Hey, ... What if ...

Man 1:

"What if" what?

Man 3:

What if it was *her*?! What if *she* was the one from the story?! What if *she* was the one who killed herself?!

Man 1:

That's crazy. The crash happened long before we were born.

Shift focus. Kate is down stage center.

[Music in: Kate's Song.]

Kate:

All around me are people, happy people—two-by-two, always two-by-two, just like in the Bible, just as God intended, just as God intended for me.

They find each other everywhere. When you find him, you'll know. It's easy—just as God intended. Surely, just as God intended for me.

I just haven't found him yet.
I must be patient—expectant, perhaps, but always patient—and I must congratulate all those who've found each other.
Yes, I must congratulate all those who've found each other.

You must wait for God to provide. You cannot chase, you cannot pursue, lest you be called a harlot—lest you be a harlot.

Men all want one thing. They'd take me if I gave myself to them; and I would let them, and I would like it.

The desire is strong and the flesh is weak. We must call upon God to always aid us in our fight against Evil—in our fight against ourselves. It is never-ending.

But surely, what I want is not sinful. Surely, it is innocent. Surely, it is pure. Surely, it is Heaven on Earth.

I just want someone to hold me

—and nothing else—just to hold me; and there we'd be, in each other's arms, forever.

I must keep waiting.
I must be patient.
I wish God would hurry.

[Caesura.]

Shift focus.

Man 3:

And then, she couldn't take it anymore, so she got in her father's truck and crashed it into the tree! *That's* what happened!

Man 2:

That ain't what happened. Don't you remember? Her father made the family move to another town. Was real embarrassed after he had to pick his daughter up from the gentleman's club down the road. She was gonna start workin' there, but then someone saw her walkin' in and told her father. I heard somethin' about her doin' it to try to find a husband.

Man 1: Talk about desperate . . .

Shift in focus.

Kate:

All around me are people, happy people—two-by-two, always two-by-two; two by-two, always two-by-two.

[Music out.]

Shift back.

Man 2: Well, I heard a *different* story.

> Man 1: Don't you start.

Man 2: Hey, it *could* be true.

Man 1:

I got evidence for mine.

Man 3:

Evidence you made up.

Man 1:

Aw, shut up!

Man 2:

Anyway, I heard it was a girl who got real mad and killed her boyfriend. Then, to make it look like an accident, she put his body in his truck, put a brick on the gas, and sent it into that tree. Then, his ghost caused her to light herself on fire in front'a the tree. You're s'pposed to see the two of 'em down there if you drive by at night. Sometimes, it's just him, all tore up from the crash. Sometimes, it's just her, all burned and disfigured. Sometimes, it's both of 'em.

Man 1:

That's clearly bullshit.

Man 3:

Hey, that sounds kinda like Heather. Sounds like somethin' she would do.

Man 1:

Who?

Man 3:

You know her. We went to high school with her. She was one'a them girls who don't like men. *Pause*.

Man 2:

A lesbian?

Man 3:

No, . . . Well, she *likes* men—far as I know, anyway—but she don't *like* men. Know what I

mean?

Pause.

Man 1:

No.

Man 3 sighs.

Man 3:

Anyway, no man here is good enough for her; and she ain't afraid to let 'em know. I asked her for a date, once. She said "no," 'course.

Man 2:

Have you tried to date every girl from high school?

Man 3:

At least once. Ain't that many of 'em.

Hey, I'm progressive. I believe in e-qua-li-ty. They have the right to say "no"—but I have the right to ask; and *nobody* can take that right away from me.

Pause. Man 1 and Man 2 stare at Man 3.

Anyway, Heather said "yes" to a friend of mine, once—Sam. You remember Sam? They went to a movie.

Man 1:

Where else you gonna go, in this town?

Man 3:

All he would say was it didn't end well. I'll bet he tried to put his arm around her and she tried to break it in half.

Shift in focus. Heather is down stage center.

[Music in: Heather's Song.]

Heather:

No! Not for me! Not here!

Let's end this now. I won't lead you on. The answer is no!

No, I don't want to kiss you, to sleep with you, to end up like the other girls in this town: young and pregnant—and miserable.

If he leaves, then you're stuck in this town, waiting tables to provide for his child; or worse, if he stays, you're still stuck in this town, with the two of them, for the rest of your miserable life—or until the divorce.

No, thanks! Not for me!

My mother says love should be simple, Innocent and simple.

You're just supposed to know it, to know it when you feel it.

Desire fades. Beauty fades. The moment fades, but you'll both still be here; and then, what's left? What's left?

Innocent is not the same as being stupid; It's not the same as not thinking. Simple is not the same as taking what's in front of youjust because he's there, just because they tell you there might be no one else—

because there's always someone else; someone somewhere else—not here.

I want love to be simple. I want love to be innocent; But love can't be simple or innocent not for me; not here.

[Music out.]

Shift back.

Man 3:

I haven't heard from Sam in a long time.

Man 2:

I've told him to come with us here. Never comes. I seen him with Frank a few times. I think they're friends.

Man 1:

Maybe he's a weirdo, too. Thinks he's too good for us.

Man 3:

Naw, not Sam. Anyway, he's got his own troubles. Remember him and Kate?

Man 2:

Everyone in this town's heard about him and Kate—at least three times. It's ancient history.

Man 1:

Wasn't *that* long ago. We were outta high school only a year or two. Think about it: dancin' close with Kate, at a *church* dance, while her father watches. How *stupid* can you get?

Man 3:

I wonder how that ended up. I wonder who won—Sam or Jesus.

Man 2:

I never understood why anyone went to those dances. For one thing, you can't drink, before or during—they all but frisk you before you go in. For another, you've got the pastor and his wife starin' at you all night, makin' sure you don't get too friendly with your partner—even if they *knew* you were goin' steady!

Man 1:

"Leave room for Jesus, kids."

Man 2:

I dunno. Who thinks about matters of the opposite sex in a church basement?

Man 3: I would. What's the difference?

Shift in focus. Sam is down stage center.

[Music in: Sam's song.]

Sam:

She liked me. I knew it.
It wasn't too hard to tell she liked me.
It wasn't too hard to tell she wanted to kiss me; and I wanted to kiss her,
but I didn't, and she didn't, and we didn't—but it would've been so easy.

We danced, slowly—
as close as we dared, with everyone watching.
I wish time had stopped,
and we'd frozen there, warm and comfortable, for forever—
with everyone watching; with everyone watching, if they dared.

But it's good we didn't. Yes, it's good we didn't. No one here understands pleasure. They're all scared of pleasure.

For them, a kiss means you're interested in marriage. It's either chastity or marriage,
For marriage means pleasure guilt-free—
as if "for eternity" and "for now" were the same.

Better we never begin. Yes, better we never begin, but it would've been so easy.

When the dance was over, I looked at her, she looked at me, and we were both terrified—because of what we wanted,
Because we knew we both wanted it,
Because of how much we both wanted it,
Because we shouldn't,
Because we couldn't,
Because it would've been so easy.

[Music out.]

Shift back.

Man 1:

Well, it's almost midnight. Guess we'll soon see which story is true and which stories are bullshit.

Man 2:

So, wait a second. We got three different stories and three slightly different versions of what's s'pposed to happen down there. Don't that seem weird? I mean Hell, I could make up another one right here where I sit.

Man 1:

Alright, smart ass, do it. *Pause. Man 2 thinks.*

Man 2:

Alright:

Two guys want the same girl. They come to this tree. They beat the shit outta each other. One guy pulls a gun. The other guy pulls a gun. BAM! BAM! Dead. Both of 'em. Both bullets go right into the tree—er, scarrin' it somehow. And every night at the stroke of midnight—the time they killed each other—you see their ghosts standin' down there.

Pause. Man 1 and Man 3 stare at Man 2. Not bad, huh?

Man 1:

I could'a come up with a better one. Frank appears between the tree and the road.

Man 2:

Shut the Hell up. No, ya couldn't. Sam appears behind the tree. Man 3 sees Frank and Sam.

Man 3 (whisper): Psst! Guys!

Man 1:

What?

Man 3 (whisper):

Look!

Man 1 and Man 2 look. All three gasp and hurry to get on the ground behind the log. They peer over it at the clearing below.

Man 1 looks at his watch.

Man 1 (whisper):

It's midnight.

Man 3 (*whisper*): Ho-ly *shit*. (*to Man 2*): You were right.

Man 1 (whisper):
He can't be right. He just made that up.
Pause.
Didn't ya?

Man 2 (whisper): I did. I swear.

Man 3 (*whisper*): Maybe nobody had the story right. Maybe somethin' else happened down there.

Man 1 (*whisper*): Well, shut up and let's see what *really* happened.

Sam comes out from behind the tree and goes to meet Frank. Frank turns around and jumps when he sees Sam.

Sam: What're you doing here?

Frank: I could ask you the same question.

Sam:
Just out for a walk. Trying to clear my head.

Frank:
Five miles outside town?

Pause.

Then we are doing the same thing for the same reasons. What has your head clouded?

Sam: Many things. Life in general.

Man 3 (*whisper*): Are they talkin'?

Man 1 (whisper): Yeah.

Man 3 (whisper):

What are they sayin'?

Man 1 (whisper): I can't quite tell.

Sam:

What has your head clouded? *Pause*.

Frank:

I am leaving town tomorrow, Sam. I guess I never told you. Do you remember that I applied—a year ago, now—for a philosophy program? Well, I was accepted. They gave me a fellowship.

Room, board—I pay for nothing. For four years.

Pause.

Sam:

When did you find out?

Frank:

Weeks ago. Months ago.

Sam:

Why didn't you tell me?

Frank:

I don't know. I guess I didn't believe it myself. I still don't believe it. I keep reading the paperwork they sent me, over and over again, to make sure there hasn't been a mistake, to make sure I haven't made this up.

Pause.

But it's happening. I'm leaving tomorrow. It's really happening. *Pause*.

Sam:

That's it, then. That's the solution.

Frank:

What do you mean?

Sam:

Surely you, of all people, know what I mean. We have to *leave*, to get *out* of this place. How many times have we had this conversation?

Pause.

You know, I think I finally understand why Heather was so angry when I tried to put my arm around her. She wasn't really *angry* with me, so much as angry with all the guys of this town. Well, maybe not angry—repulsed. Repulsed by everyone here, and everyone in other places like it.

Pause.

We don't belong here, Frank. We need to get out of here, to leave all of them behind—where they *want* to stay; where they belong.

Frank: Sam—

Sam (interrupts Frank):

Don't you dare tell me I'm stereotyping. Or generalizing. Of all people! I've said before. I'll say it again. We've lived it, Frank. *Lived it!* We *know* it's true. We *know* what they're like.

Do you know how many times I've been asked to go to Bible study at that church in the middle of town? And not just by the new pastor. By his wife, by his son, by his daughter. By people from high school. By their parents. I've been asked at least once by every member of the congregation—which is two-thirds of the town!

I finally said "No, thank you." They kept asking. They *still* ask me, Frank. Every single time one of them finds me—in the grocery store, in the library, in one of the five restaurants in town. They once caught me in the gas station liquor store! You'd think, by now, they'd have put me on the "do-not-call" list. But no. Always the same rehearsed smiles. Always the same rehearsed conversation. It's a game. They want my soul. But *more* than that, they want my compliance; they want me to do as they say. *They want to win their game*! I'll bet that even if I did tell every single one of them to go jump in a lake, *they'd still keep asking!*

Pause.

And then, there are the other people. Everyone else. The other third of this town. For them, there's nothing more to Life than eating, drinking, pissing, shitting, sleeping, and having sex—one big loop, until you die. That's it!

And you can't question it—any of it! There are certain things you just can't talk about with these people. With some of them, after a certain point, they'll go into robot mode and start hitting you with their Bibles while spewing verses. Others will demand that you accept their uninformed opinions as undeniable facts—just so they can feel "right," just so they can win. But with everyone else, they'll just stare at you—like cattle—waiting for you to stop talking so they can change the subject.

I really don't know which is worse!

Pause.

What other solution is there? Please tell me, if you have one, because I don't. I mean, look at you! That's what you're doing: giving up, giving up on these people. I wish I could come with you, Frank. I really do!

Man 2 (whisper): They yellin'?

Man 1 (whisper):

One of 'em is, but I can't tell what about. Somethin' 'bout a liquor store . . . ?

Man 3 (whisper, to Man 2):

When do they start shootin' each other again? Pause. Frank sighs.

Frank:

It is true. I am leaving.

Pause.

I understand the frustration, the anger—intimately. But Sam, I cannot blame them—as easy as it is to do that. It would be unfair.

You and I, we agree. We think there is a better way of thinking, of doing, of living. I firmly believe that the world in general would become a better place for everyone—overnight—if more of its people engaged with philosophy and critical thinking. But this is our opinion, not a fact; they are not wrong for not living this way.

Sam:

I don't believe it. You're *defending* them? After everything? After all the staring? After all the whispering behind your back? After all the stupid rumors? I remember one of those idiots in high school telling his friends that you were a closeted serial killer!

Man 3 shivers.

Man 3 (whisper):

Just got a chill down my spine. Someone must be talkin' about me.

Man 1 (whisper): Shhh!

Frank:

For us, dealing with the people here is discouraging. It is annoying, exhausting, depressing. But we cannot blame them. They are not wrong. They are not wrong for not liking what we like. They are not wrong for not understanding us, or for not understanding what we talk about. It is true: we don't fit here; we don't belong here; but they *still* are not wrong.

Sam:

But surely, *surely*, you don't approve of their religion, their politics, their willful ignorance, their anti-intellectualism?

Frank (*slightly impatient*):

Would it really matter, if I did? Things would still be as they are, with or without my support. Pause.

I *don't* approve of their anti-intellectualism. I *don't* approve of their religion. I think these are ultimately destructive, for them and for everyone around them. But I will *not* condemn them for having a spirituality, for having a relationship with something greater. I will *not* condemn them for having opinions, no matter how ill-informed or ultimately detrimental; and do you know why? Because I will not *condemn* them—for anything. That does no good—for anyone.

Pause.

We both must never forget that people can always change their minds. But this should not be the goal. The goal should be a conversation—an exchange of ideas—where each respects the

other as a sentient, rational being; where each cares more about understanding the other person and the other side; where the end result is not a victory for either, but an enrichment of both.

Pause.

For my part, I've done a terrible job of promoting this. I never sat down with any of them and tried to have such an exchange.

Sam:

Come on! They all would have made fun of you! You would have been wasting your time.

Frank:

But I never tried! I never gave any of them a chance. How can I blame them for not understanding when I never tried to make them understand?

Pause

Who knows? Maybe, if I had been—I don't know, braver—I could have converted the whole town. I could have started in them the fire of intellectual inquiry.

Sam:

Most would have slammed the door in your face. You know that.

Frank:

Most, yes. The vast majority, yes. But what about the few—three, two, maybe just one other person—whose interest I might have piqued? What if they have been here all along, just as frustrated and as isolated as we are, and we never knew because we never looked—because we never asked?

Sam:

Frank, think in terms of statistics for just a moment. Do you realize how unlikely it is that we'd find *even one* other person *remotely* like us?

Pause. Frank thinks.

Frank:

I found you; or rather, we found each other.

Pause.

Think about us, about how we came to have such conversations. We both were in the same English class Sophomore year. Then, we started having lunch together. For the sake of argument, let's say I made the "first move," so to speak. If I had assumed you were just as anti-intellectual as everyone else, then we never would have become friends. This very conversation would never have happened.

Pause. Frank sighs.

These missed opportunities are what I've been thinking about recently. Who knows? Maybe our lives here would have been very different—a little more bearable for all of us.

Pause.

But perhaps it doesn't matter anymore. I'm leaving tomorrow and the residents of this town remain as they were. They are all doing what they think is best, what they think is right—just like us. In this way, we are all good people.

For now, I leave. I think that is best. I think that ultimately, I will be happier. Perhaps they will be happier, too; or at least just as happy. Maybe that's all that matters—for now.

Pause.

Man 3 (*whisper*): Can you hear anything they're sayin'?

Man 1 (whisper):

No, but now the other one's deliverin' the State of the Union.

Sam:

I want to ask you about something. Do you remember Kate? The former pastor's daughter? *Frank nods*.

I went to Morton to get coffee with her. That's where they moved—not too far from here.

Man 3 (whisper):

Did he just say Morton? I think he just said Morton.

Man 1 (*whisper*): Shut the Hell up! I'm tryin' ta hear.

Sam:

We talked. It was nice. She's so beautiful; that hasn't changed. I wish she were dating someone or married or something. Then, maybe I could stop thinking about her.

Pause.

I want to leave, Frank. I want to leave. I *need* to leave. And I guess I could, too. I've got relatives in the city. I could go there, find work. I could just get on a train and never come back, but . . .

Pause.

When I first saw her yesterday, it was just like at the end of that dance all over again. Just as wonderful, just as powerful, just as terrifying. I know she felt the exact same way. Same look.

Same terrified look.

Pause.

And she's sad, Frank. I could tell that right away; and I know why. She hates herself. *Pause*.

I want to help her, but . . . I think she'd only get upset if I questioned her beliefs.

Pause.

What should I do?

Pause.

Frank:

I don't have the answers, Sam. I wish I did.

Sam:

You have more answers than I do.

Frank:

I only have my opinions.

Sam:

That's what I asking for. I'll *take* your opinions. I *value* your opinions. I always have. *Pause. Frank sighs.*

Frank:

First, don't kiss her—not yet. The time for that may come later, but only under certain circumstances. A kiss means something very specific to her; you know that. For her sake, you should speak to her in her own language, where romance is concerned.

Go back to Morton. Get coffee with her. Talk to her—about everything: about God, about religion, about her father; about the universe, about why things are the way that they are.

But more importantly, listen. Get her going; but then, observe. You would be doing her a great service.

In doing this, if you find that there is only physical desire shared between you, get on the next train, get as far from her as you can afford, and never look back; never return to Morton, if you can help it. Leave it in your head—where it can live perfectly forever—and move on with Life. That way, you are not at risk of causing her destruction.

Pause.

Sometimes, we dream something well beyond probability—sometimes, beyond possibility. This does not mean we should stop dreaming. Even though it is so unlikely that I will find out there my community of intellectuals—the one of which I've so long dreamed—I'm *still* going to look for it. Something is better than nothing. Right now, I have nothing—present company *more* than excepted—but I think there is so much "something" to be found, out there. Even though it will likely not be as I have dreamt it, it might be enough—it might be better.

Pause

So, *if* you find that there is more than physical desire—*much* more—*or* if you both understand what is meant and intended by the action, then you can kiss her—but *only* under one of these circumstances.

Pause. Sam smiles.

Sam:

You're a son-of-a-bitch, Frank—always have been.

Pause.

I'm really glad you didn't assume I was anti-intellectual.

Pause. Frank smiles.

ause. I rank sinne

Frank:

I'm really glad you and I kept talking.

Man 3 (whisper): They still goin'?

Man 1 (whisper):

Yeah. The one guy's at it again. Maybe he's recitin' the phone book.

Man 2 (*whisper*): I still can't hear them. We're too far away.

Man 3 (whisper):
Maybe we should go.
Man 3 makes to move. Man 1 firmly grabs his shoulder.

Man 1 (whisper):
Don't move.

Man 3 moves back in place.

Man 2 (whisper): We need to get closer. Pause.

Man 1 (whisper, to Man 2): You first.

Man 2 (*whisper*): *I* ain't goin'. *I* ain't gettin' attacked by no ghost.

Man 1 (whisper):
I ain't goin'.
Pause.

Man 3 (whisper): Guess we're stayin' here.

Man 1 (whisper): Yep.

Man 2 (whisper): Yep.

Man 1 (whisper, to Man 3):
Pass me a beer—quietly!
Man 3 reaches for the cooler, while trying to remain on the ground, hidden by the log.

[Music in: Postlude.]

[Music out.]

Fade to black.

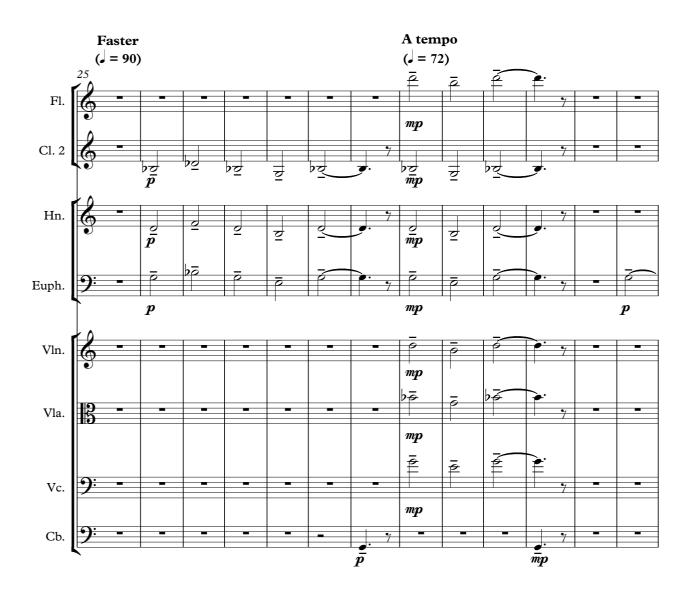
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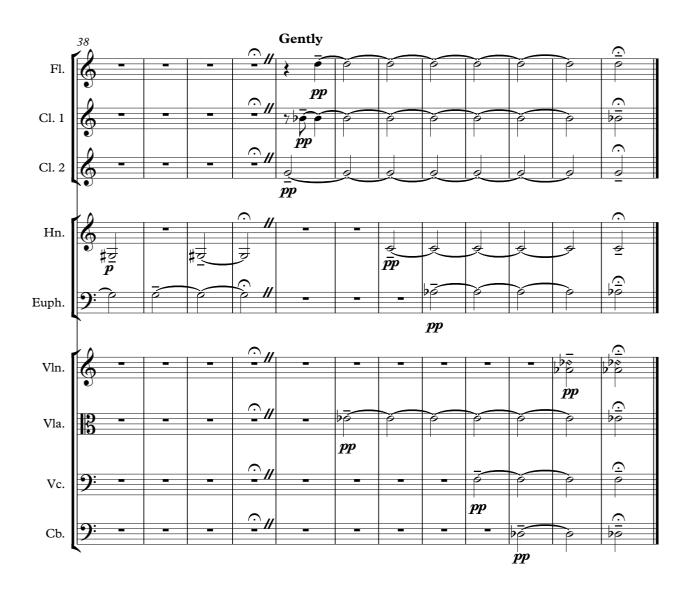
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Prelude



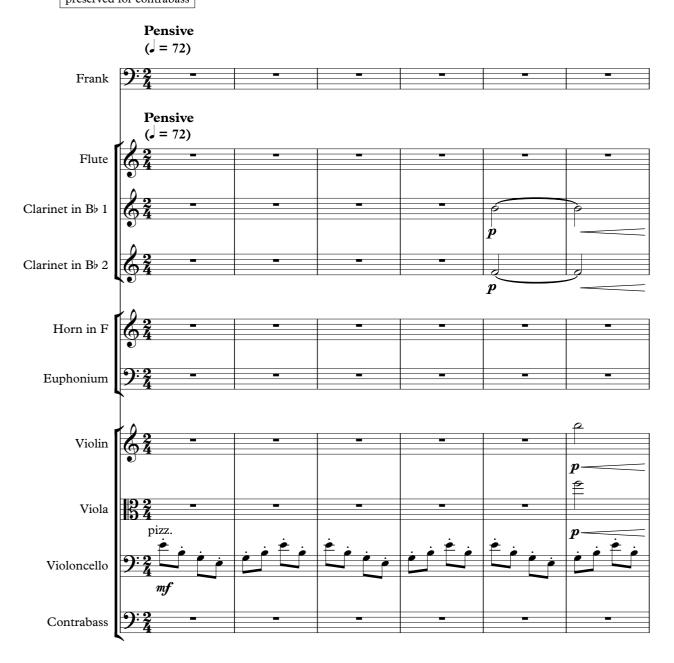






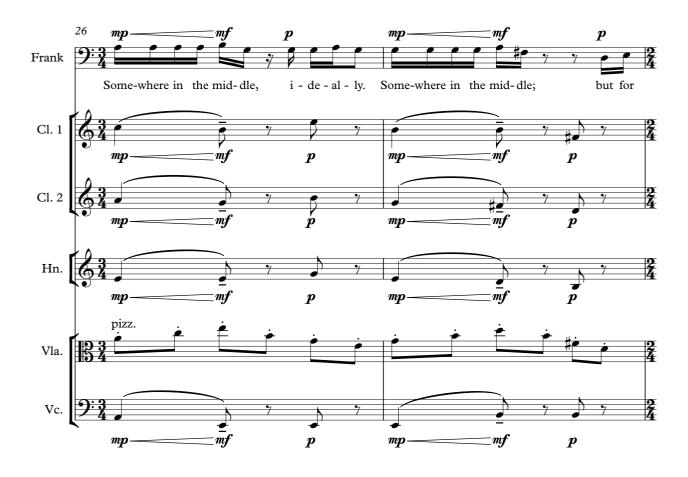
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Frank's Song





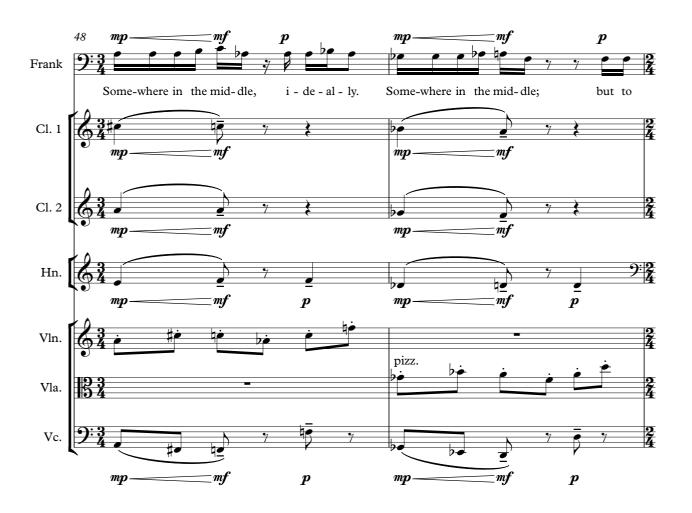






















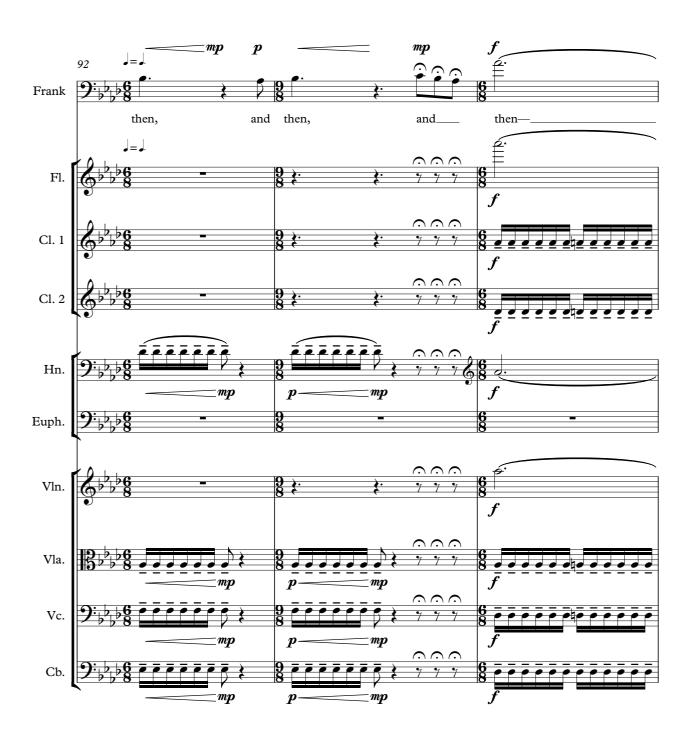










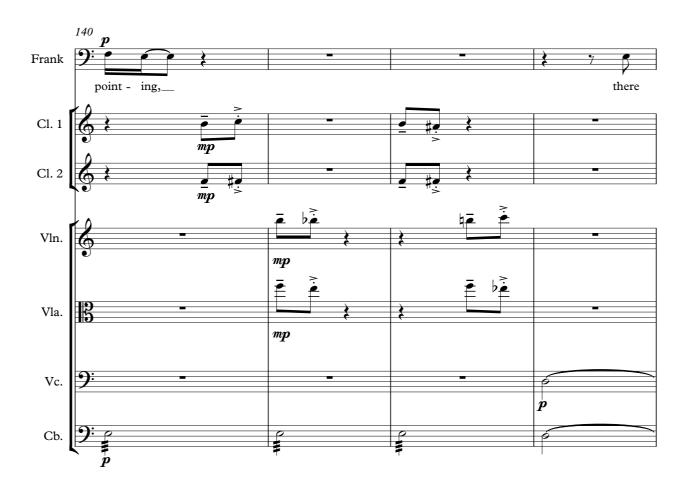










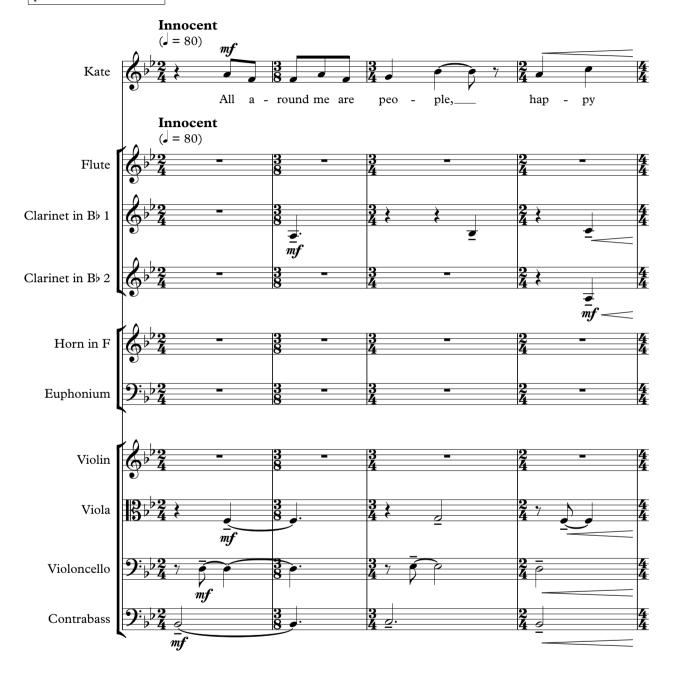




*Score in C

*Octave transposition preserved for contrabass

Kate's Song













Più mosso



Kate | Jacob | Paragraph | Pa

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p

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A tempo

Vla.



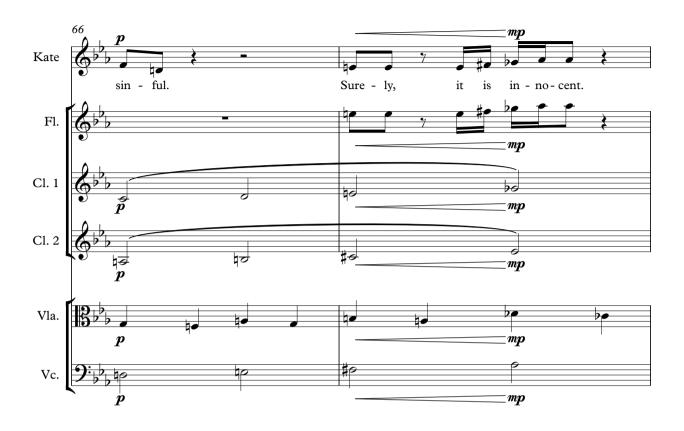






















 $\label{eq:Man 3: Man 3: } \mbox{"...} \mbox{and then, she couldn't take it anymore, ..."}$

. . .

Man 1:
"Talk about desperate . . . "





A tempo







*Score in C

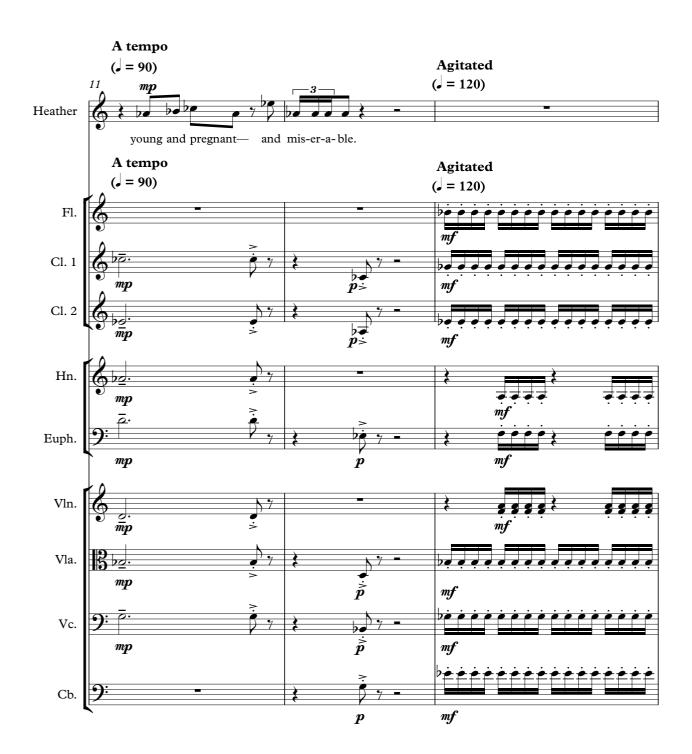
*Octave transposition preserved for contrabass

Heather's Song

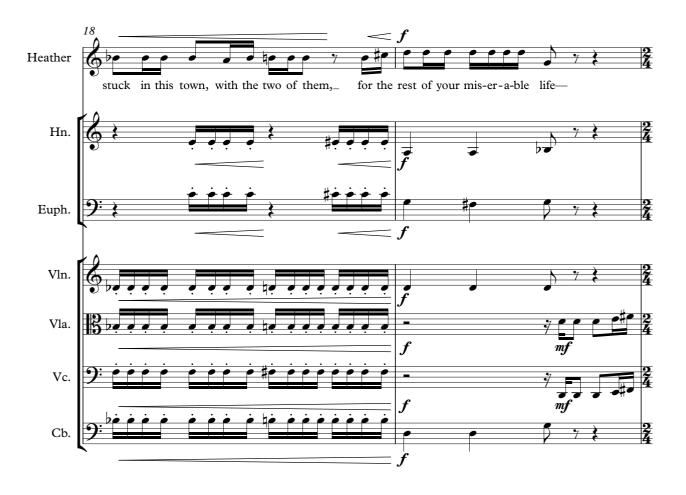
































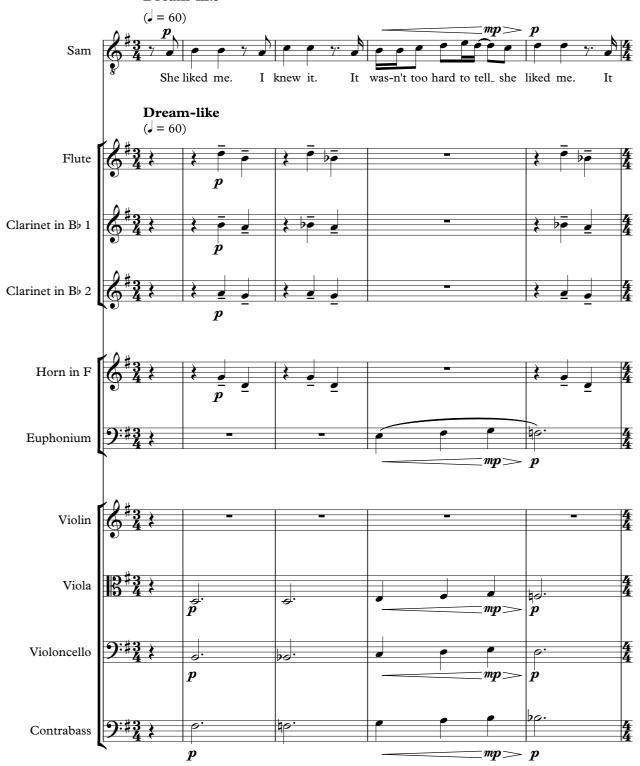


*Score in C

*Octave transposition preserved for contrabass

Sam's Song

Dream-like









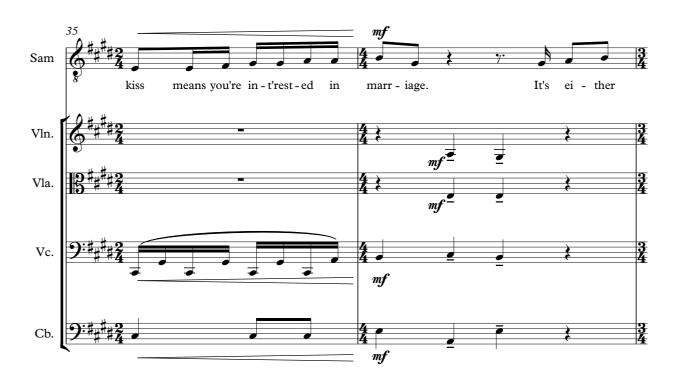






























*Score in C *Octave transposition preserved for contrabass

Postlude

