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Robert Nelson's *A Room with a View*: The Creation of a Contemporary Opera

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ROBERT NELSON'S *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*:
THE CREATION OF A CONTEMPORARY OPERA

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts
in the School of Music of the College of Fine Arts
at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky

Director: John Nardolillo, Professor of Music

Lexington, Kentucky
2016

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ABSTRACT

My recent engagement as music director and conductor of Robert Nelson's *A Room with a View* (1992, rev. 2004) has offered me the valuable opportunity to work on an opera side by side with its composer. The purpose of this dissertation is to reconstruct the various stages of the process of creation, interpretation, and performance of a contemporary opera, addressing aspects of the collaboration between the composer and the conductor.

The methodology used in my research is based primarily on direct observation and interview. The investigation is conducted from the perspective of a "participant-observer," due to my personal involvement in the project, as music director and conductor first, and then as interviewer and researcher.

The document will be organized in three sections:

- the first chapter will establish the context and specific features of my research, providing a scholarly background in relation to the study of the relationship between composer and conductor;

- the second chapter will focus on the process of composition in all its stages. I have defined this as the "extended creative process" of *A Room with a View*;

- the third chapter will discuss the Michigan State University production of the opera, considering several aspects of the artistic collaboration between Robert Nelson and me, as well as my involvement in the process as conductor.

Through my research, I wish to provide useful insight into the crucial aspects of the composition and the production of new music. In addition, the project aims to offer a fresh contribution to the investigation of the relationship between composers and interpreters, and perhaps could provide some background reference for an interrogation about the current state and the future of American opera.

KEYWORDS: Robert Nelson, *A Room with a View*, Contemporary Opera, Composer–Conductor Relationship

Marcello Cormio

May 16th, 2016

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I would like to thank Melanie Helton, Head of the Opera Program at the Michigan State University College of Music: without her initiative, I would have not come in contact with *A Room with a View* and Robert Nelson. She is in fact a fundamental link in the practical circumstances of the genesis of this project.

I am grateful to William Shomos for graciously making his work available to me for consultation. His dissertation was an essential source of information to reconstruct the initial stages of the creation of the opera. I would also like to thank the librettist Buck Ross for bringing Shomos's work to my attention.

I would like to acknowledge my research director, John Nardolillo, for his help and guidance in my research and throughout my studies, as well as Lance Brunner for his invaluable advice and constant presence in my years at the University of Kentucky. I am also grateful to the other members of my committee for their support in my academic career: Nancy Jones, Everett McCorvey, and Jefferson Johnson.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present dissertation is to reconstruct the various stages of the process of creation and musical realization of a contemporary opera, within the context of the personal and artistic relationship between its composer and the conductor in charge of its performance. The idea behind the project has been developing within the circumstances of my recent work on Robert Nelson's opera *A Room with a View*, composed in 1992, and offered in a new production in the fall of 2015 at the Michigan State University Opera Theater, under my musical direction.

It is indeed a valuable opportunity to work on an opera side by side with its composer. The structure of the document revolves around the interaction between creator and interpreter, represented by Nelson and myself. My research will address aspects of the composition process and of the collaboration between the composer and the conductor throughout the stages of rehearsal and performance of the piece.

An unusual aspect of my project is my involvement in the investigation as both the researcher and a participant in the relationship being studied. In addition, the project has developed in the context of my direct participation as interpreter and performer of the opera. This allows for a unique vantage point, a privileged perspective "from within" in my research. On the other hand, it may constitute a challenge in maintaining a desirable degree of neutrality when analyzing and evaluating the different aspects of the collaboration between conductor and composer and of their human and artistic relationship. For this reason, my work as researcher will also consist in filtering and synthesizing the description of the creative process as provided by the composer, as well as my own account of my personal experience in the recent Michigan State University production of the opera.

Another interesting aspect of this investigation is the opportunity to describe in detail the genesis of a work of art through the direct testimony of its creator. I have not found a substantial amount of scholarly literature on this aspect. Apart from famous examples of romanticized accounts by contemporaries, who had a close relationship to a composer (such as the stories about Beethoven by Schindler), the literature often consists of analytical research and reconstructions based on historical documents and similar written sources, and supported mainly by the scholarly study of manuscripts and sketches. In modern and contemporary times, interviews and direct testimony of composers, who talk

about the process of creation of their works, are not infrequent, but often do not achieve a deep level of description.

Finally, *A Room with a View* has not been the object of any previous research, except for a doctoral dissertation written in 1999 by William Shomos.¹ This document will serve as a major source for the reconstruction of the initial stages of the composition of *A Room with a View*. The document's account of the events leading up to the inception of the project will be often referenced in my second chapter.

This dissertation is organized in three chapters.

The first chapter will establish the context and specific features of my research, in particular in relation to the study of the relationship between composer and conductor, providing a scholarly background to this topic through the exposition of some significant examples as investigated in relevant articles.

The second chapter will focus on the process of creation of *A Room with a View* in all its stages. In particular, I will discuss Nelson's personal approach to composing opera, and his musical and cultural background and influences. I will then give a brief account of his career as an operatic composer, in order to contextualize the creation of *A Room with a View* in a historical and critical perspective. A detailed description of the composition process will follow, extending to the stages after the 1992 premiere, and including the evolution of the piece through subsequent productions and performances until the present day. In addition to Shomos's dissertation, the main source for this chapter is the composer's testimony as collected by me through direct interview.

The third chapter will revolve around my personal experience with the opera as conductor, focusing on my relationship and collaboration with Nelson during the Michigan State University production.

My research should provide useful insight into some crucial aspects of the composition and the production of new music. Furthermore, the project aims to offer a fresh contribution to the investigation of the relationship between composers and interpreters, and perhaps could provide some background reference for an interrogation about the current state and the future of American opera.

¹ William H. Shomos, "*A Room with a View: A Critical and Historical Study of Robert Nelson's and Buck Ross's Opera Based on the Novel by E. M. Forster*" (DMA dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1999).

My research develops from the perspective of a “participant–observer.” In particular, the exposition of the genesis of *A Room with a View* utilizes the methodology of the direct interview as a primary tool of investigation. This method is obviously paired with a subsequent process of analysis and synthesis of the composer’s own reflections. In addition, the perspective of my own experience as collaborator, interpreter, and interviewer, filtered and synthesized as well, integrates the methodological approach of my research.

CHAPTER ONE
PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS:
ON THE COMPOSER–CONDUCTOR COLLABORATION

The attempt to investigate and describe the genesis of a piece of music implies the necessity to temporally trace the different stages of a process. Such investigation must therefore define the moment in time when the process can be considered as having started, and when it can be considered concluded. The definition of this second parameter presents a series of aesthetic and philosophical issues, some of them specific and intrinsic to the nature of creating music. A scholarly investigation—especially one of very limited ambitions like the present—cannot aspire to find an unequivocal solution to this issue; but this investigation, according to its specific object and scope, can and should at least define its intent in relation to the determination of that conclusive moment in time. From the perspective of a performer/interpreter, and in particular a conductor, my research finds relevance in extending its object beyond the moment of completion and premiere of a score, to include the stages subsequent to that moment. For my purpose, I would like to refer to this object of study as the “extended creative process” of a musical work. Indeed, my document features a specific attention to the artistic collaboration between the composer and the conductor, and its effects on the evolution over time of a supposedly definitive musical product.

The relationship between composer and conductor is a topic that deserves further investigation, partly because a separation of the two roles has emerged only in a relatively recent age of the history of Western music. This transition marks in a way the ending of an era, between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, during which some important composers were also the main conductors of their own music. Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Serge Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky, and more recently Leonard Bernstein and Pierre Boulez are major figures of composers/conductors, in an age that witnesses the disappearing of this phenomenon.

The idea itself of a “pure” composer, who conceives a musical creation that transcends its author’s immediate relationship to the instrumental medium and practice of it, is a very contemporary one. For centuries, in Western art music composers were primarily musicians and performers, whose artistic development and ambitions would naturally include creating new music for their elected instrument, and then becoming the primary interpreters of that music—and often the only ones in their lifetime. Another relevant

element was the once universal practice of improvisation, as a link between composing and performing. This practice is completely fading away in recent times. Ensemble music, obviously, has always presented a separation between the figures of the creator and the performers. But the nineteenth century witnessed the rising of the role of the conductor, from coordinator of a group of players, serving as timekeeper and point of reference, to the status of ultimate interpreter, and by broad definition, “performer” of orchestral music. In this context, composers conducting their own music represent a unification of the roles of composer and performer into the same musician even for the orchestral repertoire. This happened in the case of the figures mentioned above, but it remained a relatively brief or isolated phenomenon, with the incumbency of the twentieth-century separation and specialization of musical careers.

My discussion aims to investigate an interaction between those two figures, when they are represented by two distinct individuals—the common situation in contemporary musical practice. This is the objective of the present work, applied to the specific case of my personal experience with *A Room with a View*. In particular, I intend to address one aspect of the relationship between a composer, who is not the immediate performer of his own music, and the musician who serves that function: their possible collaboration in the achievement of the final musical product, and the opportunity for the performer to have an influence on the creation of new versions of a piece. In the context of the present investigation, the study of such collaboration and its influence is strictly limited to the case of a composer and a conductor working in close proximity, spatially and temporally. It is beyond the scope of this project to discuss the ideal relationship between a composer (and the ever invoked composer’s “intention”) and all the possible interpreters of his music, during and after his lifetime. This would open the field to legitimate and very interesting questions, but of a more philosophical character—questions related to the meaning of interpreting music, and the finite or infinite nature of a musical creation.²

² The literature on this topic is obviously very broad, both from the more general perspective of semantics in music and philosophy of music, and from the specific standpoint of the stylistic approach to interpretation of music produced in a certain age or by certain composers. I would like to only mention a couple of interesting sources: a recent book: Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting Music* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011); and an article which I found to be relevant to my point in a very specific way: Terence J. O’Grady, “Interpretive Freedom and the Composer–Performer Relationship,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 14, no. 2 (April 1980): 55–67.

Within the limits of this investigation, it is useful to discuss the most obvious example of influence of the performer in the creative process. There is a greater possibility for the performer to contribute to the composition process, when the music is written for an instrument that is not the composer's "natural" instrument. In such cases, the intended performer (historically often also the dedicatee of that music) may act as a consultant for matters related to instrumental technique and idiomatic writing, exerting some influence, even if marginal, on the compositional process. This is a quite common scenario, which can be exemplified by the famously reported case of the multiple suggestions made by violinist Joseph Joachim to Brahms on the solo part of the Violin Concerto Opus 77.³

The main question I pose in my investigation is whether a similar contribution can be identified from a conductor working closely with the composer on an orchestral piece, or in my case on an opera—and in what form and to what extent.

Before proceeding to the specific case, in this chapter I wish to discuss some historical examples of significant relationships between conductors and composers, as discussed in scholarly literature.

I have earlier mentioned composers such as Mahler or Stravinsky, who were also legendary interpreters of their own music. Between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, important figures of conductors appear and gravitate around those composers. Often those conductors were revered as the ultimate interpreters of a specific repertoire through the composers' approval. In some cases, they established with said composers an exclusive collaboration and a personal and artistic relationship worthy of attention and investigation. It is a multifaceted topic of study, involving artistic, cultural, historical and psychological considerations, and greatly varying in its aspects and relevance from case to case. While some of the most famous conductor–composer relationships seem to have led to fruitful artistic communication and collaborative exchanges, in other cases this is not true. It is interesting to see, for example, that in the case of composers who actively sought careers as conductors, like Mahler, Rachmaninoff, and Stravinsky, the relationship to contemporary conductors of their music does not necessarily indicate an intimate connection and an artistic

³ For an investigation of the role played by Joachim in the composition process of the concerto, see: Boris Schwarz, "Joseph Joachim and the Genesis of Brahms's Violin Concerto," *The Musical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 503–526.

dialogue. Mahler was the only one of the three to establish himself as a successful conductor of international stature and indisputable value. For this reason, perhaps, he was also able to create friendly relationships with younger conductors like Bruno Walter and Otto Klemperer.⁴ But, even if both Walter and Klemperer went on to become “Mahler conductors” *par excellence*, they did not enjoy peer-to-peer relationships with Mahler: rather than on an actual artistic exchange influencing Mahler’s creative output, those relationships were more based on the caring attention and guidance of a mentor for his protégées and assistants. On the other hand, both Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff were unsuccessful in their pursuit of a glamorous conducting career. In Stravinsky’s case, this fact might explain his contemptuous attitude towards contemporary conductors of his works. In particular, he was famously unkind to one of the most strenuous advocates of his music, Serge Koussevitzky.⁵

For the purpose of this discussion, it appears particularly relevant to examine a couple of documented examples of this kind of relationship. The main focus of my discussion is how artistic collaborations of this sort may lead to a partial involvement of the conductor in the creative process.

The first case I would like to mention emerges from an article by Elizabeth Bergman Crist, appeared in *The Journal of Musicology* in 2001.⁶ The author, in reconstructing the composition process of Aaron Copland’s *Third Symphony*, illustrates in the second part of the paper a compositional stage subsequent to the “first” completion of the score and its premiere. The “compositional history” of the symphony “extended beyond its premiere on 18 October 1946,” involving the intervention of two conductors, Serge Koussevitzky and Leonard Bernstein.⁷ The input from the two conductors, motivated by their being the musical directors of the American (Koussevitzky) and European (Bernstein) premieres of the

⁴ On some aspects of Mahler’s conducting career: Andrew D. Keener, “Gustav Mahler as Conductor,” *Music & Letters* 56, no. 3/4 (July–October 1975): 341–355. A very important source for our knowledge of both Walter’s and Klemperer’s relationships to Mahler is found in the direct interviews that both conductors often gave for the television in the last part of their careers. I retrieved some useful references in regard to this in: Norman Lebrecht, “The Variability of Mahler’s Performances,” *The Musical Times* 131, no. 1768 (June 1990): 302–304.

⁵ An interesting perspective on the relationship between Koussevitzky and Stravinsky is offered in: Leon Botstein, “On Conductors, Composers, and Music Directors: Serge Koussevitzky in Retrospect,” *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 583–590. See also: Victor Yuzefovich and Marina Kostalevsky, “Chronicle of a Non-Friendship: Letters of Stravinsky and Koussevitzky,” *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 750–885.

⁶ Elizabeth Bergman Crist, “Aaron Copland’s Third Symphony from Sketch to Score,” *The Journal of Musicology* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 377–405.

⁷ Crist, 393–403.

symphony, can be evaluated in relation to their different influence and personal rapport with the composer. Both Koussevitzky and Bernstein were composers themselves (while Copland was also a conductor). Koussevitzky's influence must be related to his authority and musical power. He was twenty-six years older than Copland, and a very influential musical figure of international stature. As music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he was also the commissioner and future publisher of the piece through the Koussevitzky Foundation. The younger Bernstein had just risen to fame after his training, in fact as Koussevitzky's student and assistant. On the other hand, Bernstein had a notoriously friendly and intimate connection to Copland. His uniquely outspoken personality and exuberant approach to human relationships seem to have played a substantial role in the composer's acceptance of Bernstein's opinions and suggestions.⁸ As I have said before, these types of relationships and collaborations appear to constitute a very complex topic to investigate: many factors play into the delicate balance of an artistic exchange between two (or in this case three!) different musical personalities within the context of a creative process.

In the case in question, "Copland, Bernstein and Koussevitzky all participated in the process, and perhaps this multiplicity of voices accounts for some of the difficulties critics and audiences have had coming to terms with the finale, and the symphony as a whole."⁹

Crist details the evidence of the different stages of revisions to the fourth movement of the symphony. She analyzes four different scores (a manuscript and three Ozalid copies of it), apparently used as work copies by all three musicians, and presenting handwritten markings and emendations by Copland mainly, but also by Bernstein and Koussevitzky, as well as by other individuals involved in the revision process (like Leslie Rogers, librarian of the Boston Symphony).

The revisions consist mainly of different possible cuts in the finale, and a few corrections and changes in tempo/metronome markings, and expression markings. What is relevant here is the existence of an intense musical and intellectual exchange between the composer and the conductors. This exchange clearly affects the creative process throughout the stages of revision after the premieres, in the form of a multilateral consultation, or at times also through the individual and single-handed initiative of the conductors, defending their case with the composer only after having applied their own revisions to the score in

⁸ Crist, 398.

⁹ Crist, 393.

rehearsal and performances.¹⁰ We find evidence of such interactions not only in the scholarly investigation on the four aforementioned exemplars of the manuscript, but also in the epistolary communication between Copland and both Koussevitzky and Bernstein. Remarkably, this model of composer–conductor human relationship and musical collaboration is very similar to the one between Robert Nelson and me. In fact, the main instances of modifications resulting from Nelson’s and my collaborative effort during the rehearsal process were cuts and tempo changes.

Furthermore, in both the examples I am reporting, one can appreciate the importance of the human component in any interaction between composer and conductor, in addition to the merely musical aspects. In the third chapter, my document will briefly discuss the dynamics of the delicate balance on which such interactions are based. I will then attempt to recount the most significant “moments” of the human relationship between Nelson and me from an intellectual and emotional standpoint.

The second case I have chosen to report is an even more powerful example of the influence exerted by a conductor on the compositional process. Indeed, it documents revisions made to the score by the conductor before the premiere of the piece in question.

I am referring to a 1989 article by Gabriele Dotto¹¹ on the alterations to Puccini’s *La Fanciulla del West* resulting from the collaborative involvement of Arturo Toscanini.

The circumstances were the 1910 Metropolitan Opera premiere of *La Fanciulla* under Toscanini’s musical direction. Dotto’s investigation initiates from the study of a document resurfaced in recent times from the archives of Casa Ricordi, “the heavily marked orchestral score used by Toscanini for rehearsals and performances” of the premiere. In Dotto’s words:

The score is peppered throughout with Toscanini’s handwritten changes to phrasing, dynamics, tempi, and orchestration. There is a surprisingly large number of such marks, ranging from light adjustments in articulation to the occasional recasting of an orchestral sonority.

¹⁰ Crist, 398–400.

¹¹ Gabriele Dotto, “Opera, Four Hands: Collaborative Alterations in Puccini’s ‘Fanciulla,’” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 604–624.

While most of these interventions deal with finer technical details of performance and of the conductor's interpretation, many others involve changes in orchestration that can even seem heavy-handed in the context of the score's overall texture. Radical or not, nearly all of the marks on the 1910 proof sheets were later transferred onto the plates of the revised score, issued as the "New Edition copyright 1911" seven months after the premiere.¹²

While the case of a conductor's participation in the compositional process in the stages prior to the first completion of the score does not coincide with my personal experience with Nelson's opera, I consider this example very relevant for my purpose, as it deals with some issues and considerations strictly inherent to operatic music.

The picture emerging from the article and from our knowledge of documents and historical evidence is that of a complex and inconsistent relationship between Puccini and Toscanini. This relationship can be traced back to the first stages of Toscanini's career, and seems interestingly interrelated with Toscanini's early and intimate friendship with one of Puccini's most vehement rivals and detractors, his fellow Lucchese composer Alfredo Catalani.¹³

An artistic figure diametrically different from Puccini in many respects, Catalani had a short and unhappy life, doomed by his frail physical constitution, illness, and an oversensitive and volatile personality. He was never able to come to terms with the misfortunes of a mostly unsuccessful career as an opera composer.

A unique friendship was born between Toscanini and Catalani. The nineteen-year old conductor was as ardent and talented as unknown and inexperienced, but he soon became Catalani's favorite conductor, and champion of his music. On the other hand, the composer was desperately in need of approval, affirmation, and support in such adverse artistic circumstances. The intimate bond between the two was partly based on a common criticism of the rising star of Puccini.

Certainly Toscanini felt the constant need to reassure Catalani in his claim of artistic superiority to his rival. Catalani's feelings toward Puccini, at times appearing as a form of rancorous hatred motivated by jealousy of Puccini's increasing success, was probably not

¹² Dotto, 605.

¹³ See John W. Klein, "Toscanini and Catalani: A Unique Friendship," *Music & Letters* 48, no. 3 (July 1967): 213–228. The following four paragraphs all make reference to this article.

shared by Toscanini on an emotional level. Nevertheless, it can be connected to the conductor's initial attitude of criticism, or at least skepticism, toward Puccini's artistic accomplishments.

The long relationship and collaboration between Puccini and Toscanini did not develop on the base of a true and deeply felt friendship, and did not appear to foster mutual feelings of unconditional respect and approval, as had the one between Catalani and Toscanini.

It rather seems that the relationship was at times unbalanced, with Toscanini often in a position of strength, and feeling entitled to intervene in the process of refinement of the score, and to even say the last word on matters of revision.

To quote Dotto again,¹⁴

Their friendship was inconstant over the years and both men were given to moody extremes, but in their working relationship Puccini displayed unwavering trust in his colleague's opinion.

Their first important contact came with *La Bohème*, which Toscanini had conducted at its premiere in 1896. During the following three decades the conductor worked closely with Puccini on several important productions, up through the final stages of composition of *Turandot*; even after the composer's death, he continued in an advisory capacity, this time to Casa Ricordi, with his primary involvement in the completion of *Turandot*.

The article documents Toscanini's interventions in the revision of the earlier *Manon Lescaut*, with substantial changes in the orchestration, dynamics, and expressive markings. These changes encountered Puccini's full approval, and are recognized "so effusively" in a 1910 letter from Puccini written on the occasion of the Ricordi late publication of *Manon*'s full score, as to indicate a remarkable contribution from Toscanini to the final version of the score. In the case of *Fanciulla*, a letter dated June 1st, 1911 documents "Puccini's reliance on Toscanini's advice," and suggests that Puccini would sometime consciously assume a deferential position in his relationship to the conductor. Quoting directly Dotto's English translation of Puccini's letter to "Arturo": "You'll have to be patient!! Listen: I've made a cut in the last act that works well... And I am also considering a cut or two in the first act... but I'll only decide on this after we've had a chance to speak, and I can get your advice."¹⁵

¹⁴ Dotto, 606.

¹⁵ Dotto, 607.

In fact, the interventions on the score of *Fanciulla* that can be traced back to Toscanini were almost entirely transferred in the published version, as mentioned before. The quantity and quality of those interventions testify to a significant contribution of the conductor in finalizing the musical product, and speak to the general issue of the conductor's involvement in the creative process in the specific context of opera. As Dotto insightfully argues, the complexity and multifaceted nature of an artistic endeavor like opera does necessitate a certain degree of flexibility of the composer in his choices and malleability of the product. I agree with Dotto in considering opera a very complex machine: it involves theatrical, visual and aural, orchestral and vocal elements; it relies on the physics of light, motion, sound; it presents problems of staging, and spatial and temporal coordination; it deals with technical, logistical, acoustical issues. Realistically, in opera, the finalization of many details often needs to be reserved for the rehearsal process.

Dotto's analysis of the *Fanciulla* proof sheets reveals four different levels of revisions, mostly consisting in Toscanini's handwritten annotations that can be ascribed to his unilateral initiative. These annotations likely belong to an early stage of the rehearsal process, when Puccini was not yet present, and were in their majority approved by the composer upon his arrival in New York.

The most abundant markings refer to phrasing, dynamics, and articulation. A second level of revisions involves "added orchestral voices within an existing timbral structure."¹⁶ The general purpose of these changes appears to be the need to thicken and reinforce the orchestral sound. In Dotto's opinion, these revisions are to be related to the specific acoustical characteristics of the old Metropolitan Opera hall, reportedly having "a 'dead' feel to it"¹⁷ because of the vastness of the 3600 seats space and the lack of sufficient sound-reflecting surfaces. Dotto argues that Toscanini's tenure at the Met and his previous experience of the acoustic demands of the hall may have motivated his choices, and made the conductor feel authorized to apply these changes to the score.

The third level is represented by added or modified orchestral parts, which actually alter the orchestral fabric of the passage, from the addition of alternating voices in the winds, to the "ad hoc creation of moving parts."¹⁸ Again in this case, the supposed purpose of these

¹⁶ Dotto, 612.

¹⁷ Dotto, 613.

¹⁸ Dotto, 609.

alterations was to enhance the brilliance and effectiveness of the orchestral element of the opera, and counterbalance the ungenerous acoustics of the hall.

In an increasing degree of structural “weight” of the revisions, the last level involves a few instances of cuts, and subsequent reworking of passages, adjustments to the vocal lines, reshaping of a phrase. In this case, it is interesting to note that, while Puccini’s final decisions in regards to cuts appear to heavily rely on Toscanini’s opinion, most of these revisions were made by Puccini, probably in consultation with the conductor, sometimes in contrast with the conductor’s suggestions. But something as substantial as the insertion of a short cadenza-like phrase in the tenor aria “Ma non vi avrei rubato” was entirely a creation of Toscanini. Puccini accepted the change without question.¹⁹

This case is a truly fascinating account of an intense artistic collaboration between such personalities of composer and conductor, and offers remarkable evidence of the active participation of a conductor in the last stages of the composition process.

In addition, Dotto’s conclusions strike me for their relevance and resonance with my personal experience. The author remarks that the specific nature of the collaborative revision process in question is “peculiar to a particular artistic relationship.” This assumption reinforces the idea that an investigation on the composer–conductor relationship can only to a limited extent proceed on a general level. Instead, in describing a particular case of that relationship, it could stimulate critical considerations in regard to the complex process through which music is created and interpreted, culturally perceived and appropriated, ultimately defined within specific confines. It invites us to think of music as a living organism, and evaluate the different roles of the human agents involved in its life.

To conclude with Dotto, an investigation on this topic, while able to offer “precious insight into the final shaping of such complex theatrical and musical constructions as an opera, [...] can also erode pet assumptions regarding [...] the exclusivity of the creator/composer’s role in all phases of the decision-making process and [...] cause us to redefine our conception of a composer’s own scale of priorities concerning various elements of the compositional mosaic.”²⁰

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¹⁹ Dotto, 616–617.

²⁰ Dotto, 623.

CHAPTER TWO

THE “EXTENDED CREATIVE PROCESS” OF *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*

In my interview with the composer Robert Nelson, it emerged that his work on opera is rooted into a “traditional” approach to composing. The learning of a craft through some sort of practical apprenticeship, the idea itself of composing as “craft,” is reflected in Nelson’s background and musical training. He learned how an opera works “from the inside,” by playing in an opera pit, conducting rehearsals, and coaching singers. As much as this might seem an obvious approach, consecrated by a long-standing tradition, it is not such a common element in the current training of contemporary composers. Their path to opera often includes very diverse backgrounds and cultural influences, from popular to electronic music, and a professional training that might be based exclusively on a theoretical approach to the genre. In addition, our current musical landscape is characterized by a major shifting in some traditional values associated with opera. Quick and drastic cultural changes have affected the audiences’ taste, orientation, and perception. The ever-predominant influence of new technologies has had an enormous impact in the arts. Finally, composers and artists work today in the context of a fast-paced and business-oriented reality, increasingly more distant from the aforementioned traditional values.

Nelson recounts his first conscious contact with opera during his college years. His studies in composition at the University of Nebraska under Robert Beadell, started in 1960, were the occasion for an initial close encounter with the genre.²¹

Nelson’s work with Beadell was instrumental to his coming in contact with opera through direct experience as a performer: “one of his operas was produced while I was there, and I ended up playing in the pit—I was a trumpet player at the time.”²²

I have identified this piece as *The Sweetwater Affair* (1960, produced 1961), one of Beadell’s three operas.²³

²¹ At the University of Nebraska Nelson would receive his Bachelors degree with a major in music education and his Master of Music degree.

²² Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

²³ The other two were *The Number of Fools* (1965–66, rev. 1976), and *Napoleon* (1972, produced 1973). We learn from “Composer of Commissioned Work for ACDA Convention” *The Choral Journal* 13, no. 7 (March 1973): 29, that “Robert M. Beadell was born in 1925, studied composition with Leo Sowerby and Darius Milhaud, and prior to joining the faculty of the University of Nebraska, he taught theory and composition at Central College, Fayette, Missouri. Beadell successfully composed for a wide variety of performance mediums, ranging from full

The pit experience with Beadell's opera intrigued and attracted Nelson to the genre. It also revealed to Nelson some of the challenges and less inspiring aspects of the "opera business" from the very start, as he got to witness "first-hand the frustration Beadell had getting his operas produced."²⁴

This first operatic experience was enough to compel Nelson to actively seek a continuation of his studies, which would include composing opera as one of his main interests. He pursued a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition under the tutelage of Ingolf Dahl²⁵ and Halsey Stevens at the University of Southern California.²⁶ During his studies with Dahl, he manifested an explicit interest in writing opera, and he was subsequently invited to study opera as a coach/conductor under the tutelage of Walter Ducloux.²⁷

symphony orchestra to a tuba ensemble. Between these extremes is a body of work for chorus, solo voice, solo instruments, chamber orchestra, band, and various instrumental ensembles. In addition, he wrote for the singing voice through the avenue of opera." Five stage works are known by Beadell: in addition to the three operas mentioned above, an operetta, *The Kingdom of Caraway* (1957), and a musical, *Out to the Wind* (1979, based on Willa Cather's short story *Eric Hermanson's Soul*).

²⁴ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

²⁵ On the fascinating figure of Ingolf Dahl (1912–1970), German-born composer, conductor, pianist, educator, I would like to mention a comprehensive source in the book: Anthony Linick, *The Lives of Ingolf Dahl* (Bloomington, IN, Author-House, 2008). I have also consulted the obituary published at Dahl's death by his colleague Halsey Stevens: Halsey Stevens, "In Memoriam: Ingolf Dahl (1912–1970)," *Perspectives on New Music* 9, no. 1 (Autumn–Winter 1970): 147–148.

²⁶ Incidentally, while at USC, Nelson maintained his direct experience as performer, in both the Wind Ensemble and the Orchestra.

²⁷ We read in the *In Memoriam* for Walter Ducloux published on the website of the University of Texas at Austin: "The cultural climate of a country depends not on what you can purchase, but what you can produce." These words of Dr. Walter Ducloux (1913–1997) prophesied the future of regional opera companies throughout the United States into the twenty-first century. Centennial Professor Emeritus of Opera at The University of Texas, Ducloux was an international conductor, pianist, translator, writer, and educator whose career spanned over 50 years from Czechoslovakia to California. His zeal to bring the American public to opera knew no boundaries [...]. A prodigiously gifted individual, whose expertise included philosophy, drama, and languages, Walter was born in Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1913. [...] he studied both philosophy and German literature while simultaneously studying composition and piano. After receiving his doctorate in 1935, he moved to Vienna where he attended conducting master classes with both Felix Weingartner and Josef Krips." <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/1999-2000/memorials/Ducloux/ducloux.html> (accessed April 10, 2016). Ducloux was in his youth an assistant to both Bruno Walter and Toscanini, who brought him to New York. He was fluent in four languages, went on to a high-level academic career at three different American universities, was incredibly active as conductor, educator, lecturer, public figure, and also produced more than twenty-five English singing translations of operas. His thoughts and his attitude towards the contemporary culture and business of opera seem to resonate very much with Nelson's orientation as it emerged in our conversations, and reveal his teachers' substantial impact on the future path of his career as an opera composer.

In Nelson's words, he told his teacher that he wanted his dissertation to be an opera, and "the first thing Dahl said was: 'If you are going to write opera, you got to experience opera kind of from the inside'."²⁸ Dahl sent him to Ducloux, who in turn told him that he "better get some experience coaching and conducting, if he wanted to learn how to write an opera." A precise orientation and a univocal educational philosophy emerge from these testimonies, confirming the traditional idea of practical apprenticeship as the only truthful path to learning the "craft."

Nelson enrolled in Ducloux's conducting class, as well as in his opera history class. In the conducting class, the approach was absolutely "hands-on": learning was mainly done through practice, coaching singers and conducting the traditional operatic repertoire in the pit. This provided Nelson with a remarkable experience, which according to his testimony was the backbone of his future development as an opera composer.

The Commission was the title of Nelson's first opera, composed as his doctoral dissertation project. The libretto was written by Stan Peters, who had created libretti for Robert Beadell, and whom Nelson knew through his old teacher.²⁹

Nelson considers Italian opera, and especially Verdi, his model of operatic style, in particular in relation to musical and dramatic structure. In our conversation, he mentions how he was exposed to the traditional Italian operatic repertoire in his household since his youth, thanks to his father's love for that repertoire, and was probably influenced by this exposure from those early years and throughout his later career. But when asked about the main source of inspiration for him as a young composer, from his very first attempt at opera with *The Commission*, he only mentions two models: Igor Stravinsky and Benjamin Britten.

Nelson's orientation is based on a strong sense of the essential requirements of a work conceived for the stage. My impression in approaching his work and experiencing an artistic collaboration with him is that he instinctively possesses the basic qualities of a "man

²⁸ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

²⁹ The story of *The Commission* was original, and revolved around a scandalous love triangle involving a painter, infatuated with a singer, in turn infatuated with another singer of the same sex. The painter takes his revenge by painting a graphic and obscene portrait of the singer he loves and putting it on display. Nelson recounts how his teacher Ingolf Dahl had quite a say in the composition process. Dahl raised some very serious issues about the dramatic structure of the libretto, requesting that an off-stage event, crucial to the dramatic effect of the piece, be transformed to an on-stage scene and reintegrated in the main progression of events of the opera. In Nelson's words: "We went along with it, and the new scene is probably the strongest scene in the opera."

of the theater,” in the same way we recognize those qualities in every successful opera composer.

Nelson says that, since the time of his first attempt, he has become firmly convinced that any stage work needs a solid and somewhat pre-organized musical structure, which of course reflects the dramatic structure of the piece. He also confesses his dislike for the direction taken by “too many contemporary composers of opera, who have lost the sense of musical structure.”³⁰ In fact, his models are very limited among his contemporaries: in our conversation, the only mention of a twentieth-century American opera composer is Carlisle Floyd, who, in Nelson’s opinion, achieved his best results in *Susannah*.

Nelson’s main focus in his technical and aesthetic approach to opera is the intimate relation between the dramatic substance of the piece and a clear formal structure. In such structure, the musical realization should reflect dramaturgical aspects like action, stage movements, conflicts and relations between characters, and dramatic development. Nelson’s point of view is very specific. The correspondence between drama and music is realized through the use of all the possible tools available to a composer, from harmonic language to motivic gestures, from orchestral colors to vocal characterization. But beyond this, Nelson believes that the first and foremost task for the opera composer is to find the most appropriate form for the dramatic content, meaning a predetermined structural “mold” in a traditional sense.

Considering a process that is initiated with the structuring of the libretto, and what the libretto suggests or requires in terms of specific musical forms, the questions Nelson asks himself are very practical ones, and once more, dealing with composing as a “craft.” Will this opera consist of a series of set musical numbers? Will there be a clear distinction between closed forms and more open-ended sections? How will different styles, from recitativo, to arioso, to expository dialogue, alternate, and in what proportions? Will there be spoken dialogue? Orchestral preludes or interludes?

In his skepticism towards the contemporary landscape of newly composed operas, Nelson believes that too often these fundamental questions do not seem to be answered in the work of the composers of his generation and of the following ones, probably because the traditional approach is altogether obliterated by newer perspectives.

³⁰ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

In this light, it is not surprising that Nelson's models are in the traditions of Italian opera, and, among the twentieth-century composers, in Britten and Stravinsky's musical styles. Besides those models, he confesses that he learned more about composing for the stage from Bernstein's *West Side Story* and from Sondheim's pieces, than from any other examples.

Going back to *The Commission*, in Nelson's own words³¹

At that time, working with Stan [librettist Stan Peters], we tried to structure the libretto in such a way so that I could build set pieces: even though there was a kind of a continual flow, there was a sense of certain things beginning and certain things ending. I felt like it needed arias, it needed ensembles, and so literally we just built set pieces, and that has pretty much stayed with me. That has been something that I have felt pretty strongly about, and have tried to build on since my first attempts at opera. I started with that, and part of my training, when I was doing my doctoral degree, was of course developing the musical technique and the compositional technique to make that work, without necessarily going to a piece where you have interpolated dialogue—but I have done some of that too.

A Room with a View appears to be Nelson's most mature accomplishment in opera, and a successful realization of his compositional approach and aesthetics. In this work, besides a number of specific stylistic references, I have identified signs of Britten's influence in the structural conception, in the use of harmony and in an idiomatic sense of musical proportions. The influence of Stravinsky's language is more evident in some details of the rhythm, the texture, and the internal fabric of motives and phrases.³² In the following discussion, I will mention some interesting examples of how an ultimate correspondence between musical and dramatic structure was achieved through subsequent compositional stages in specific passages of the score.

Before considering Nelson's most recent opera, a brief outline of his operatic output can help us understand his development as a composer for the stage. There is a considerable

³¹ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

³² In my conversation with Nelson, we spent some time discussing the other minor stylistic influences emerging from the score. Some of them are explicit references, but all appear to me quite recognizable, and when asked about specific passages, Nelson always agrees with my interpretation: Puccini for some of the *cantabile* passages, especially in Lucy's part; Prokofiev in the two "carriage scenes;" Ravel in the brief orchestral interlude within "The Bathe." Nelson also mentions how some musical gestures, like the clarinet *arpeggiato* accompaniment to Cecil's reciting of the "promenade" passage from the book he is reading, were intended to explicitly evoke a reminiscence of Verdi's most popular operatic music.

gap between *The Commission*, which dates to the late 1960s, and Nelson's next operatic work, *Tickets, Please*, a one-act piece on a libretto by Sidney L. Berger adapted from D. H. Lawrence's story, commissioned by The Texas Opera Theatre, and first performed in 1985. In the almost twenty years in between, Nelson was very active as a composer for the voice. He also produced a remarkable number of "dramatic" compositions as musical director of the Houston Shakespeare Festival, for which he provided songs and incidental music for nearly the complete canon of Shakespeare's plays. His inclination for dramatic music is evident in his large-scale choral compositions as well. Nelson's interest in the theatrical aspects of music was certainly continuous throughout his career. If this interest did not result in an equally continuous output of operatic works, the main reason resided, by the composer's own admission, in the practical difficulties inherent to the genre of opera and its production. As we will see in his own testimony, reported by Shomos in the first chapter of his dissertation,³³ Nelson never had any hesitation in embarking on an operatic project when the opportunity arised and the conditions for a production were favorable. These practical reasons dictate the peculiar chronology of Nelson's works for the stage, grouped into two constellations. Two decades after the youthful attempt of *The Commission*, in the matter of two years, three stage pieces were premiered: *Tickets, Please* (1985), another one-act entitled *The Demon Lover* (1986), and the full-length opera in two acts *The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyville* (1985-86). The second group of operas includes *The Selfish Giant*, premiered in 1993, and *A Room with a View* (1992, rev. 2004).

Each of these five mature stage works experiments with slightly different formal solutions to Nelson's preoccupations about the correspondence between musical and dramatic structure. The composer mentions the example of *The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyville* as an interesting combination of a traditional operatic style with the musical theater structure of set musical numbers alternating with spoken dialogue. In it, the overall structural problem was resolved much more easily than in a piece conceived as a continual musical flow like *A Room with a View*.

The story of the conception and creation of the first version of *A Room with a View* emerges in many details both from the account given by Shomos in the first part of his dissertation, and from the words of Robert Nelson himself in my direct interview with him.

³³ Shomos, 8.

The spark of the creative process came entirely from the librettist, Buck Ross. Founder and director of the opera program at the University of Houston, Ross admittedly embarked on the project of writing an English libretto as an experiment, with the explicit intent to create an opera that he could sell. His inspiration was found in the 1985 movie *A Room with a View*, which he saw before he had read Forster's novel. Ross was attracted to the story and saw in it a source for concrete operatic possibilities.

The relationship between Ross and Nelson was already an amicable one between two colleagues in academia connected by mutual feelings of respect and admiration. They had also previously collaborated on a workshop production of *Tickets, Please*, directed by Ross at the Des Moines Metro Opera Apprentice Program (1986).

When asked about his collaboration with Ross, Nelson referred to it as a "Mozart–Da Ponte" kind of relationship.

Historic examples of complicated and at times conflictual relationships between composer and librettist are famous and well-documented in direct sources: to cite one above others, Verdi's demanding and dominating personality shaped the terms of his collaboration with different librettists, from Solera to Piave to Somma.³⁴

The relationship between Mozart and Da Ponte, on the other hand, has always been considered an exemplary one, for the apparent affinity of temperament and sensitivity of the two men, and the absolutely miraculous artistic results it produced.³⁵

I believe that Nelson's reference indicates the unproblematic nature of his collaboration with Ross, and their almost complete communion of intents in approaching the creation of *A Room with a View*. It appears that there always was a mutual understanding and a shared aesthetic vision between composer and librettist throughout the process of genesis of the opera, making the final product the natural result of a fruitful artistic exchange between two creative minds.

The chronology of the preliminary stages of the creative process is uncertain, but Nelson remembers how Ross approached him one day in 1990 with "this idea for an opera based on *A Room with a View*," asking him if he "would be interested in doing the music."³⁶

³⁴ I would like to list here just a couple of references on this topic: Francesco Izzo, "Verdi, Solera, Piave and the Libretto for 'Attila,'" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 3 (November 2009): 257–265; Philip Gossett, review of *Carteggio Verdi–Somma*, edited by Simonetta Ricciardi, *Music & Letters* 87, no. 3 (August 2006): 447–451.

³⁵ For an introduction on the topic: R. B. Moberly, "Mozart and his Librettists," *Music & Letters* 54, no. 2 (April 1973): 161–169. See also: Brigid Brophy, "Da Ponte and Mozart," *The Musical Times* 122, no. 1661 (July 1981): 454–456.

Shomos discusses the process of creation of the libretto, reporting an interesting detail about Carlisle Floyd's counseling intervention, seemingly with a substantial effect on the direction taken by Ross towards the final result.³⁷

I found a slight discrepancy between Nelson's recollection of the order of events, and what is reported by Shomos. According to Shomos:³⁸

The only person who proofed the libretto before Ross handed it over to Nelson was internationally renowned opera composer Carlisle Floyd. [...] One of Floyd's suggestions that Ross did take was to format the libretto differently. Ross had written it in a dialogue play form, but Floyd advised Ross to change it to a more poetic layout in free verse, in order to unlock better the creative powers of the composer.

Nelson's version is different:³⁹

I took one look at the first draft that Buck brought to me, and I thought: "I can't do this!"—because he had written out long lines, basically like prose. So he came up with a second draft, and it was exactly the same word for word, but he had broken it up in smaller lines, and all of a sudden it looked like poetry. "Now I can do it!"

In our interview, Nelson places this reworking of the metric structure of the libretto after Ross's first proposal to him, and does not mention Floyd's role in it. Shomos, instead, reports that the libretto was re-drafted before Nelson even knew about the *A Room with a View* project at all. In later conversations with me, Nelson confirmed that he did not initially know about Carlisle Floyd's suggestions. But he remarked that Shomos is incorrect in saying that he, Nelson, was presented with the second version of the libretto, and never saw the first one.

Nelson did not hesitate to instantly accept Ross's offer. He found the story to be perfect for the purpose, with the right requirements in terms of number of characters and dramatic development. He mentions that the practical ramifications of the project were

³⁶ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

³⁷ Shomos, 6–7.

³⁸ Shomos, 6–7.

³⁹ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

discussed with Ross from the very beginning, including the possible use of a chamber orchestra, and that the conversations in their initial meetings focused on character analysis and assignment of voice parts.

The discussion of characters appears to be the first crucial stage of the creative process in Nelson's approach; it would be interesting to investigate to what extent this could be applied to the general case of the genesis of any opera. He considered those meetings with Ross very valuable for him in the formation of an overall idea of the dramatic arch and the potential musical translation of the different characters' personalities, psychological traits, and conflicts. This was an essential element in a story like Forster's, mainly based on a "subdued," all-internal kind of drama, in the context of a repressed humanity under the scrutiny of the critical and ironical eye of the author.

Ross and Nelson evaluated the assignment of voice parts to the characters together, and one of their first decisions was "making the romantic male lead a baritone, as opposed to a tenor." Continuing on this topic, the composer recounts that⁴⁰

[...] without even thinking about it, there were certain stereotypes that sort of presented themselves. In some sense, the main characters in *A Room with a View* are a bit more complex, but they just seemed to be so natural, so we did not have to talk too much about voice parts. A lot of what we had to talk about was: what kind of people these are... but it was so obvious that Miss Lavish, for example, was exactly what her name suggests. The two characters that have the most depth were certainly Mr. Emerson, and secondarily George. But I found myself very much attracted to Mr. Emerson.

Nelson and I agreed that in the case of these two characters, Mr. Emerson and George, the depth of their personalities seem to metaphorically imply the expectation for a lower, "deeper" voice type. We then briefly mentioned the specific nuances associated with the tenor voice in the context of *A Room with a View*, mentioning the two tenor characters of Mr. Eager and Cecil as personifications of an array of attributes that ranges from "slimy" to "presumptuous," from "petulant" to "conceited." Certainly the moral judgment on these two characters emerging from the novel and from the opera is not positive, or is at the least.

⁴⁰ Interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, MI, on November 13, 2015.

What is interesting in my discussion is how this assignment of the tenor voice type responds to a traditional stereotype that can be traced back to some classic examples, such as the character of Basilio in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, or Almaviva disguised as the singing tutor don Alonso in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. I find the general topic of the assignment of voice parts an intriguing matter, deserving scholarly investigation. My conversation with Nelson about this indicates its crucial importance in the creative process of the opera, with large-scale implications on the subsequent development of the dramatic and musical features of the piece.

The libretto that Nelson started to set to music between 1990 and 1991 was not yet final. The subsequent story of the genesis of the opera seems to follow two opposite directions in two successive stages. The first stage was an expansion of the libretto and the relative addition of two important musical numbers, which arguably are among the most dramatically effective moments in the opera, and two peaks from a musical and compositional standpoint. The second stage was a prolonged and progressive process of thinning, trimming, eliminating, which continued after the premiere and resulted in various stages of revision.

Both directions seem to respond to one basic issue: the adaptation of a novel to fulfill certain operatic requirements, which the arch and structure of the literary work does not satisfy *per se*. Indeed, the added materials compensate for the absence in the novel of some expected dramatic moments, both from the standpoint of the operatic conventions in terms of structure, as well as in relation to the emotional expectations in terms of dramatic development. The additive process required the "invention" of new material by the librettist, in order to provide the piece with what was needed to make it an opera in a traditional sense.

The later process of cutting, instead, sacrificed some substantial portions of original material from the novel, in order to achieve better results of dramatic flow and structural balance.

The two additions to the libretto were conceived as musical numbers, and were made after the first act had already been set to music by Nelson in its entirety in the early summer of 1991. These additions are Lucy's aria at the end of Act I, and the trio in Act II.

Shomos explains that Ross had always felt the need for the presence of set musical numbers in the opera, but⁴¹

...was not sure at first where they belonged. As he searched for emotional high points, the place for Lucy's first-act aria became obvious to him. The trio was born out of Ross's desire for an ensemble set piece. Remarkably, this trio, the dramatic and musical high point of the opera, was developed late in the process.

In our interview, Nelson confirmed that the insertion of both sections came entirely from Ross's initiative. He repeatedly expressed his admiration for Ross's understanding of the musical requirements of an opera and his deep sense of the theatrical and dramatic aspects that needed to be reflected on a structural level. According to the composer, Ross's contribution was not limited to crafting the text, but, in a few instances, it was crucial to the actual process of composition. The unproblematic nature of Nelson's collaboration with Ross during the various stages of the process, and the immediacy with which the composer was able to translate the libretto into a musical construction, speak to Ross's ability in conceiving a coherent operatic product. Nelson also mentions the remarkable quality of Ross's work in the way his libretto suggests the musical structure in its articulations and main junctures. An example mentioned by Nelson is in the very first scene of the opera. The text is organized so that the scene naturally breaks down into sections, which can be immediately translated into the musical structure—from the conversation at the dinner table functioning as a framework, to the two interlude sections represented by the entrance of Miss Alan 1 and Miss Alan 2. Interestingly, the composer recounts how his only request to Ross throughout the entire process was the relocation of a line in this first scene (from its original place in the novel, at the very beginning of the first chapter), in order to give a satisfactory conclusion to a musical section. The line is Charlotte's "This meat has surely been used for soup," which happens at measures 96–98 of the first scene.⁴² Nelson's intuition, both from a structural and theatrical standpoint, is clearly spot-on, translating into a delightful and perfectly ironic musical gesture. As Nelson recounts, Ross did not have to think twice before making the requested change.

⁴¹ Shomos, 10.

⁴² See Example 1, in Appendix Two, 65.

It is obvious to me that the similar approach to opera and the affinity of aesthetics between Nelson and Ross is a fundamental element in their artistic collaboration. Their ideas coincided in such a way that one's input and contribution to the project naturally responded to the other's needs. Nelson's comparison of his relationship with Ross to the one between Mozart and Da Ponte seems very appropriate in this light.

Shomos mentions a number of instances where Nelson's musical personality responded to Ross's expectations. Nelson's extended tonal style was perfect for Ross, who did not want to produce an opera "sounding like Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*."⁴³ His harmonic language and colorful use of orchestral timbres is designed to assign a recognizable emotional connotation to a very defined situation or atmosphere. This punctually responded to the specific needs of the story. In fact, in *A Room with a View*, the drama evolves through the juxtaposition of psychological "vignettes" of a static nature. Furthermore, the two acts are set in two different countries, Italy and England, and each scene takes place in a specific location: a pension, the countryside, a pond, a church, a private house, and so forth.

The musical characterization of the two different geographical settings in each act was a major objective for Nelson in his composition of the piece. Broad melodic gestures, late-romantic harmonic idioms, and a warm and luminous orchestral palette are often used during Act I, in association with the Italian setting, the sunny Tuscan countryside, and the excitement of British tourists on what they consider an adventurous vacation. The very opening of Act II sets the tone for a completely different atmosphere, with a slow procession of dissonant chords, non-functionally related and orchestrated with pale, cold timbres. A single measure of music captures the feeling of a motionless and oppressive atmosphere.⁴⁴ One immediately perceives the different light of a Northern country, and at the same time its psychological reflection in the repressed life of the Edwardian society in its natural habitat. Nelson's description of this musical moment is extremely poignant: "Open a window, please!" The representation of the different locations for each scene is also brilliantly translated into music. To cite only one example, the setting of the second scene of Act I in the medieval Basilica of Santa Croce is musically represented by the archaic, modal

⁴³ Shomos, 8.

⁴⁴ See Example 2, in Appendix Two, 66.

contour of the long bassoon recitative in the opening, and later by a florid contrapuntal invention in the woodwinds, reminiscent of a sixteenth-century Italian *canzona*.⁴⁵

Nelson's structural idioms readily satisfy basic theatrical needs in an immediate and recognizable manner. Shomos suggests that Nelson's extensive use of motives provides a thread that "sews the fabric of this opera together." The motives not only convey the thought processes of the characters, but also function as "stage directions." They create commentary and suggest subtext, and even compensate for the absence of Forster's narrative voice.

Nelson and I have also extensively conversed about the role of the orchestra in *A Room with a View*. The orchestra helps to create subtext and convey dramatic meaning, together with the mentioned motivic repetition. It also provides a series of musical references, which can go from an instrumental phrase down to single chordal formations, perceivable as poetic markers. Beyond this, Nelson and I have identified specific moments where the orchestra assumes the role of a character in the drama, moving from the background or commentary level to the proscenium, with remarkable dramatic effect. One major instance we analyzed is the prelude music to the third scene of Act I, "The River," recurring in pivotal moments of the story, and finally coming back with a powerful cathartic meaning at the very end of *A Room with a View*. In our conversation, I suggested that the "River" is in fact a non-human, non-singing character of the opera, revealing itself through some of the most entrancing and expressive music of the piece. Nelson agreed, showing a deep emotional attachment to this particular moment of the opera.

One interesting example of Ross's direct intervention into the compositional process is both mentioned by Shomos, and vividly recalled by Nelson in our interview. When presented with Nelson's first draft of Act I, Ross questioned the musical approach to a specific passage, which was then entirely recomposed according to the librettist's suggestion. The passage in question is in the second part of the fifth scene, which features a lively conversation between Miss Lavish and Charlotte who are sitting on a blanket during their outing in the Tuscan countryside. Nelson had originally set this dialogue to music in a recitative style, "dry and declamatory," considering its nature plainly expository. After listening to the first musical version of the passage, Ross warned Nelson that he had

⁴⁵ See Example 3 and 4, in Appendix Two, 67, 68.

“completely missed the point:” the dialogue between the two ladies was clearly calling for an energetic, “crackling” musical translation, to reflect their excited gossiping and their girlish amusement. Nelson found Ross’s intuition revelatory, and had no doubt about the new direction to take. The second and final version of the brief passage is a fast-paced and spirited musical divertissement, which perfectly responds to the character of the situation through the use of word repetition, motivic fragmentation, *staccato* articulation, and irregular rhythmic patterns.⁴⁶

From the initial character analysis and discussion about voice parts, to the few cases of additions and reworking of sections, the different moments of the genesis of the opera considered thus far appear as isolated cases in an overall process, which both Shomos and Nelson describe as incredibly natural, straightforward and unproblematic. It is interesting to note that the story of the revisions to the score subsequent to the premiere presents more complex and problematic aspects than the initial genesis of *A Room with a View*.

Nelson confesses that his composition technique and style were “pretty well settled” at the time he began working on *A Room with a View*. In contrast to his earlier operas, the present one needed to be through-composed, which required some adjustments to Nelson’s compositional approach. He was aiming for a predetermined musical structure, keeping a sense of the confines of set musical pieces and the distinction between recitative-like passages and aria-like sections. When asked about his compositional method in *A Room with a View*, Nelson gives a succinct and very general account of it:⁴⁷

I tend to start with the vocal lines, for shape and character, but the underlying accompaniment is always in the back of my mind. After the vocal lines are set, I flesh out the accompaniment. I tend to work in short score, which make orchestrations a bit easier, but makes doing the piano reduction a nightmare. I tend to write from beginning to end. This requires me to have some notion of the overall arc of the piece at the beginning. I find it easier to then go back and rework passages.

As mentioned above, the first act was ready at the beginning of the summer of 1991. Then, at a workshop with the Des Moines Metro Opera apprentices, the two main revisions

⁴⁶ See Example 5, in Appendix Two, 69–72.

⁴⁷ Robert Nelson’s email to me of April 10, 2016.

were made, which have been discussed before: the addition of Lucy's aria, and the re-composition of the Miss Lavish–Charlotte section in Act I, scene 5.

In our conversation, Nelson mentions how important it is for the creators of an operatic work to have an opportunity to “workshop” their piece—in the case of *A Room with a View*, the entire first act. He considers the way this process normally works in musical theater as a model, which should be followed more often by opera composers and producers. In his opinion, the musical theater approach to the composition process and the production of new pieces, and the place this genre has occupied within the entertainment industry, indicate a “healthier” state of the art and a more functional role in contemporary culture than in the case of opera. Besides these general considerations, the Des Moines workshop on Act I appears as an actual stage of the genesis of the opera, with some crucial implications. I have not been able to collect a detailed description of this process, but the mentioned revisions are undoubtedly essential to the final shape of the act as we know it today, and were either a direct result of the workshop, or strongly related to it.⁴⁸

The Act I revisions and the composition of the entire second act were finalized during the fall of 1991. It is not clear at which point in this period of time the Act II trio was added by Ross, but according to Shomos, it occurred at a late stage in the process, as quoted above. The first completed version of the score to *A Room with a View* can be dated to some time near the end of 1991. Nelson recounts how the next stage of the process, the preparation of clean copies of both the orchestral and piano vocal score, and the preparation of orchestral materials, was almost as laborious as the actual composition of the piece.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ In regard to Lucy's aria, there is another discrepancy between Shomos and Nelson, or at least an ambiguity. While the composer simply told me that the piece was written “for the workshop,” Shomos's version is more elaborate: “At the beginning of the summer of 1991 [implying: before the workshop], Ross gave Nelson the text for Lucy's aria. With the rest of Act I completed, Ross staged this act with the Des Moines Metro Opera apprentices in a workshop venue. During the course of the fall semester of 1991, Nelson made the revisions to Act I (Lucy's aria and the above-mentioned gossip sequence from Act I, scene 5).” While the idea *per se* of adding the aria was certainly not a result of the workshop, we can deduce—combining the two versions of the story—some relation between the workshop and its composition, although the details are not clear.

⁴⁹ In Nelson's words: “The original score was hand copied! I got a grant to hire someone to do the parts. Her hand was exquisite, but she worked very slowly, and I had to jump in and do the parts to Act II. These were done on onionskin manuscript paper and duplicated by the Ozalid method—meaning the parts reeked of ammonia. How times have changed!” We learn from Shomos that the preparation of parts “took up most of the Spring semester” (Shomos, 9).

A Room with a View premiered successfully at the University of Houston on November 5, 1993.⁵⁰ Its performance history after the premiere is concisely summarized by Nelson:⁵¹

The opera received a second performance by the University of Nebraska Opera Theater in 1996, and a staged reading at Southwest Texas State in 1997. It was after those performances that we decided the work needed reworking. The revised version was presented by the Moores School of Music Opera Theatre in 2004. [...] A concert version was recorded in 1999 and appears on the CD “An American Voice” on the Albany label.

To complete Nelson’s summary, we obviously need to add the most recent production of the opera, the one that is the object of this paper, at the Michigan State University Opera Theater, in November 2015, under my musical direction and Melanie Helton’s stage direction.

From the available information, it would appear that the story of the “evolution” of the score after the 1993 premiere features three main stages:

- a few changes made for the 1996 University of Nebraska production, described by Shomos in detail (that production is in fact the subject of his dissertation, and the one involving him directly as stage director);
- two revisions made in preparation for the Southwest Texas State University stage reading in 1997;
- more substantial changes made in 2004 for the production at the Moores School of Music Opera Theater (University of Houston), resulting in the official revised version, which is the score I was presented with when engaged to conduct the piece last year.

All these post-premiere revisions across a period of about ten years are of the same nature: they mainly consist of cuts, and mainly affect Act II.

According to Shomos, the 1996 revisions were all made at his suggestion, and entailed a single minor cut in Act I (thirteen measures in the second scene), and a number of cuts and excisions in Act II, either suppressing unnecessary lines of dialogue or eliminating sections that impeded a natural dramatic flow or an effective closure to scenes. Shomos explains that a few instances of minor trimming of the dialogue addressed dramaturgical

⁵⁰ For more details about the premiere of the opera and its critical reception, see Shomos, 11–12.

⁵¹ Robert Nelson’s email to me of April 10, 2016.

errors that he had personally noticed and objected to. The larger cuts, instead, aimed to achieve a better structural balance and dramatic effectiveness. The main one of these cuts affects the final scene, and was made in order to avoid an “unnecessary prolongation of the opera’s end, omitting no pertinent information.”⁵²

Interestingly, the new production of *A Room with a View* at the University of Nebraska was once more preceded in 1994 by a workshop on a couple of scenes from the opera (the fourth and fifth of the second act). This workshop served as preparation for the full stage performance of 1996, and likely initiated some of the revision process.

We also learn from Shomos that the reading at Southwest Texas State University in 1997 was some sort of “middling workshop performance,” which presented a number of problematic aspects due to practical reasons, and had unsuccessful results.⁵³ Nevertheless, it is relevant to note that two new revisions, as mentioned above, were made in preparation for that performance: the rewriting of a problematic passage in the second scene of Act I, and the further trimming of the very last scene of the opera.

Immediately after the 1997 stage reading, Ross and Nelson started plans for a new production at the University of Houston, where they both were on the faculty. Nelson states that the major revisions resulting in the 2004 version were a consequence of the 1996 and 1997 performances, after which he and Ross “decided the work needed reworking.” But this reworking was equally triggered by the planning of a new production. Shomos’s mention of it is a very valuable piece of information: based only on Nelson’s words, I would have probably hesitated to directly connect the revisions in question to the Houston production, which took place seven years later.

The performance and revision history of *A Room with a View* show that practical circumstances had a crucial role in the “extended creative process.” That history unequivocally demonstrates how the life and development of this musical creation over time—and far beyond its first completion—unfolded under the influence of a series of practical factors. Among them:

- the function of the workshops, arguably involving not only the “testing” of the actual effectiveness of all structural and compositional choices made by the librettist and the composer, but also the necessity to respond to the needs of the performers;

⁵² Shomos, 13–15.

⁵³ Shomos, 15–16.

- the pressure imposed by new productions, with their concrete requirements;
- the important role played by the intervention of external agents, identifiable in the key professional figures involved in each subsequent production of the piece: from the stage director William Shomos in the 1996 production, up to my contribution in the context of the last production at Michigan State.

These facts provide substantial evidence of both Ross's and Nelson's "hands-on" approach to the creation and production of opera. Our knowledge of the historical practice of composing and producing opera confirms how Nelson's conception and methods perfectly fall in the line of tradition.

In conclusion, I need to briefly mention the major revisions made to the score of *A Room with a View* before the 2004 Houston production. My only source in regard to this is Nelson's direct account—as Shomos did not personally witness the process. Nevertheless, Shomos's dissertation constitutes an invaluable source in this regard, as it reproduces the 1996 version of the opera in its entirety, therefore documenting the sections of the score that are no longer included in the 2004 revised version. This allows for a reconstruction of the precise extent and nature of the cuts. In our interview, Nelson told me that the score underwent "major surgery" between 1997 and 2004. He confessed how both Ross and he became fully aware of the absolute necessity of these interventions, and how much more satisfactory the final result appeared to be. An entire scene was cut from Act II, of which there is no trace in the final version. The scene had been in the second position in the act, and seemed to be superfluous in the overall arc of the opera, in its description of a badminton game between Freddy, Lucy, George, and a friend. A second extended passage, which was excised from the final version, occurs in the following scene, "The Bathe" (now scene 2 of Act II), and sets to music a casual conversation between George, Freddy, and Mr. Beebe on their way to the pond. It is a little scene within the scene, containing dialogue with a mostly expository function. The passage in the novel from which this scene is drawn has a pictorial nature, which I assume would translate perfectly in a cinematic sense, but creates obvious problems from a theatrical standpoint. It requires the staging of a scenery transition overlapping with the physical motion of characters from the first scene setting to the second. Furthermore, it can easily be dispensed with in an operatic context, as mostly irrelevant to the plot. Nelson recounts that he was very happy to cut this section, as he had never been satisfied with the musical result. Thanks to Shomos's inclusion of the vocal score to these

passages in his document, we can get a sense of the musical value of the cut sections. The original second scene features for the most part a quick dialogic exchange between the two characters, with short sentences, musically reproduced by a two-voice invention type of scoring. The musical setting of the passage borrows some of its material from the Lavish–Charlotte gossip sequence in Act I, scene 5. The other passage uses a kind of texture, which is employed and elaborated in other sections of the opera (the two “carriage scenes”). Both passages resort to partly “recycling” musical material used elsewhere in the piece, and chosen for a generic association of similar characters and situations: quick exchange between two women gossiping, or four young people playing the most stereotypical “back-and-forth” game; “motion” music, be it in reference to a carriage trip or to a walk. Nelson relates that the essential reason that convinced him and Ross to make the revisions was the mere length of Act II. This act had always seemed too extended in previous performances, and had challenged the audience’s ability to remain fully engaged for the duration of the opera. Once more, a very practical reason, in the context of a traditional conception of the artistic product as “entertainment,” seems to guide Nelson and Ross in their creative choices here. The necessity to dispense with the parts of a story that do not truly enhance the drama and the audience’s emotional identification with the characters is a foremost requirement of a successful opera. In addition, an opera should present a balanced dramatic and structural arch, able to provide the spectator with a well-paced and engaging alternation of tension and resolution. Notably, some traditional operas from the classical era onward have failed to achieve a satisfactorily paced resolution of their conflicts in the final act. Even Mozart is often mentioned in this sense for some of his second acts being dramatically stagnant, and generally too long, like those of *Die Zauberflöte* or *Così fan tutte*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY PRODUCTION

In the first part of this chapter I will further discuss some general considerations on the composer–conductor working relationship. In the second part of the chapter, I will then give a systematic account of the concrete applications of these considerations in the context of my personal experience with *A Room with a View*, starting with my approach to the study of the score.

In the first chapter, I have briefly mentioned the different elements and the several layers that come into play within a relationship between a composer and a conductor collaborating on a musical product.

The personal relationship between composer and conductor generally creates the context and background for an artistic collaboration, and, at the same time, shapes its terms. The tight connection between the personal and artistic relationships is crucial to the way the interaction composer–conductor develops. This is especially true in the intense and focused context of a specific production of an opera. Such a context requires a number of elements to fall into place as immediately and unproblematically as possible, to aid a process almost entirely dictated by pressing practical circumstances.

A substantial part of that interaction seems to presuppose a definition of the roles played by each of the two agents in the process, and an implicit agreement on the unwritten set of rules that regulate their working relationship. This, in turn, needs to be partly based on a shared cultural and aesthetic vision and a general agreement on the approach to all issues related to the production of an opera. Ideally, the interaction can rely on a complete understanding of each other's needs, intentions, goals. This understanding, in my opinion and my past experience, often needs to happen on an intuitive level, as in most cases the two individuals involved will not have many chances to analyze and discuss the parameters of their collaboration. In sum, when investigating a specific case of this collaboration, one has to preliminarily observe that such an interaction between composer and conductor involves a situation where two individuals, previously unknown to each other, each with a specific background, mindset, life experience, and artistic vision, are forced by the circumstances to suddenly enter a brief and intense working relationship. This relationship will call on both to constantly and efficiently take specific decisions about a number of issues, ideal and practical,

and “make the best out” of the situation for the sake of the final musical product. While this is not an exceptional scenario, as it likely occurs very commonly in the case of any occasional working relationship between two professionals, in the field of music and arts it entails more complex dynamics. It presents delicate aspects, as it partly develops on the level of aesthetic beliefs, ideals, emotions, and even lifelong practices. Artists may tend to feel very strongly and intimately about those beliefs and practices, and might not be willing or able to negotiate them. Furthermore, and especially in music, those aspects have an impalpable nature, and can be very hard to determine, and even more to regulate.

One last element that deserves mention is the specifically musical understanding between composer and conductor, which obviously is essential to a successful and fruitful collaboration. An ideal dialogue between the two individuals interacting is initiated in the very moment the conductor opens the score for the first time, which is, in many cases, long before he will meet the composer in person. This interaction, being based solely on the written music, falls into the more general case of the ideal communication between composer and performer that I have mentioned in my first chapter. It therefore entails all the issues related to interpreting a musical score and the composer’s intentions as emerging through the signs on the paper. The fundamental difference in this regard when the composer is living is the possibility for a two-way interaction: the interpreter can ask questions and discuss all aspects of the score with the composer, and the latter can directly and importantly influence the choices of the former. This fact may largely shape the idea of the piece the interpreter forms in his mind, especially at a crucial stage of the process like the study of the score. In the case of my experience with *A Room with a View*, this interaction during the study process was very marginal, partly by personal choice, as I tended not to consult the composer if not strictly necessary.

An important consideration to make is to what extent the composer manages to express his musical intentions through notes and markings. The clarity, essentiality, and specificity of the notation is a relevant factor in the way this ideal dialogue between two minds unfolds. Secondly, a human relationship between composer and conductor already starts taking shape through the sole medium of the score. The inherent expressivity of a piece of music is a quality commonly discussed, and interestingly identified to a large extent with the ability of this music to become a channel for the emotional and human experience of the composer. This fact is often translated into such common locutions as “this music

speaks to me” or “to my heart.” It reflects the normal experience of identification with the composer through the music, and the conviction that a successful work of art will allow the spectator to create a human connection with the composer, by feeling and sharing the composer’s ideals and emotions. Besides all the philosophical considerations that this issue invokes, and that are beyond my scope, I would like to emphasize two elements. Firstly, this entire process is initiated through the score, so that the specific and intrinsic qualities of the written signs, and their effectiveness and “expressivity” in the above-mentioned sense, are quite determinant of the consequences. Secondly, the interpreter is equally crucial in the process, playing a decisive role in conveying meaning from the composer—and the score—to the ultimate receiver at the other end of the channel of communication. The conductor’s ability to interpret and the composer’s ability to be easily interpretable through the score are greatly enhanced in the fortunate cases where common ground pre-exists between the two individuals, in terms of a shared musical sensitivity, an emotional affinity, or an identity of artistic language. I believe that my collaboration with Robert Nelson represents this model in many respects.

I first received the score to *A Room with a View* in June 2015, about five months before the Michigan State University production. When embarking on a project that involves “new music,” or music that is not part of the standard repertoire and does not have a wide public diffusion, a conductor arguably faces an ideal situation. The approach to the score is not burdened by the weight of tradition and common practices, and by the authority of consecrated interpretations. This allows for a relative freedom in the seminal stages of the genesis of an interpretive concept, which begins from a fresh perception of the work and may partly invite the interpreter to a “creative” and original contribution. It is obvious that this relative freedom is limited by the prescriptive nature of a musical score, and calls for a responsible artistic approach from the interpreter in honoring the composer’s intentions. Nevertheless, tradition and collective familiarity with a piece of music create a set of implicit expectations, and may subtly but heavily condition the interpreter’s choices. In my case, the only “tradition” on the piece was represented by a recording—the 1999 concert version published on Albany label that Nelson mentions. Once having made the conscious decision to not listen to it, I did not have to deal with tradition anymore. Instead, the living composer’s influence and his upcoming participation in the rehearsal process would appear to be a much more conditioning element than any tradition or public expectation. In the case

of my collaboration with Nelson, in fact, the freedom of interpretation I was granted by the composer, his incredible respect for my musical vision, and a natural agreement between us on all relevant issues of performance created an ideal situation in this sense. But I was not aware of this when I started working on the score. I did not plan in advance not to consult the composer during my study of *A Room with a View*. On the contrary, I recall that in one of our first email exchanges, upon receiving the music in the mail, I almost automatically mentioned that I would send my questions on the score along the process. In fact, this never happened, and my study process did not need to include any consultation with the composer. If in part this was motivated by my need to form a fresh and personal interpretation of the opera deriving exclusively from the score, I see in retrospect two other main reasons for this.

A more marginal one is my personal approach to score studying. I see it as a gradual and constant discovery, often proceeding in a non-linear way, and requiring the conductor to explore in different directions, to question, struggle at times, to backtrack, rethink, and continuously adjust the aim. There is a rewarding aspect to this kind of exploration, which could be diminished by a constant consultation with the composer. Incidentally, if intended this way, score studying becomes an integral part of the artistic experience, often one of the most enjoyable and satisfying. Even more than that, for me it also becomes a spiritual experience on its own, able to create a small world of thoughts, ideas, inner emotions, and to bring a unique new dimension to a conductor's life, so intimate and somewhat impalpable, but so easy to summon on a daily basis, with the simple act of opening a score.

The most important reason for not needing to consult the composer during the study process is the general "expressivity" of Nelson's notation, and the overall clarity of his musical intentions as translated into written form. I perceived a structural clarity of thought in *A Room with a View* that made consultation unnecessary, as I felt I was always able to find the answers to my interpretive doubts in the score. I did not need to speak to Nelson at all, as his music almost always "spoke to me." For a more balanced judgment, as I am illustrating here a personal perspective and dealing with the subjectivity of perception, I suspect that this fact is related to a musical affinity and a common sensitivity between the composer and me. I have discussed how relevant this can be in my general considerations at the beginning of the chapter. More objectively, Nelson's compositional concept of a predetermined and organized structure as a requirement for an opera and his traditional approach to composition are reflected in the clarity and immediacy of his writing. Later in

my discussion, I will briefly discuss these considerations through their application to some specific aspects of the score. In the score of *A Room with a View*, the balance between a prescriptive quality of the writing and a flexibility that allows for some interpretive freedom can be also related to the composer's attitude toward the interpreter. That balance reflects Nelson's general approach to his working relationship with the conductor, and even his nature and personality. In my experience with him, I have always found the composer very respectful of our different roles, open to discussion and criticism, and completely free of any over-controlling interference from his part in the rehearsal process.

In my study of the score, the process normally includes different stages and layers, from identifying the structural organization on large and small formal levels, to absorbing the details of rhythm, harmony, voice-leading, orchestration, dynamics, and articulation. Score study from this standpoint emphasizes all the aspects geared to the objective of conducting. A large number of them are very specific and practical, dealing with the technical issues connected to leading orchestral rehearsals and performances. The conductor needs to make pretty definitive decisions on tempi and tempo transitions; identify the appropriate conducting style for each section—with choices about patterns and subdivisions; anticipate problems of balance and intonation, of voicing and effective realization of the texture, of ensemble within the orchestra and between orchestra and singers; and finally, imagine a number of possible solutions to those problems in preparation for a rehearsal. I intensely studied the score of *A Room with a View* during the summer of 2015 from this conducting standpoint. I found Nelson's notation very efficient, with a good balance between the level of detail of the indications for the performer on the one hand, and the preservation of an immediacy and "brevity" of the writing on the other—with room for interpretive flexibility.

Nelson's treatment of the vocal parts presents a very bare notation, which completely dispenses with markings of articulation, dynamics, and expression. This approach is very infrequent in contemporary music, while it represents the norm in the classical operatic repertoire, for example in Mozart. If it calls for a more attentive and responsible study of the entire score by the singer, as many suggestions about dynamics and expression can be derived from the orchestral part, it also invites the singer to a creative interpretation of the vocal line, and an exploration of all the possibilities of inflection, nuances, vocal colors, and so forth.

Nelson does not generally indicate metronome markings. The exceptions are few: for example, in the last scene of Act I, the *Deciso* at measure 19 has a suggested metronome of ♩ = 96, and later on, at measure 68, the *Poco più mosso* is marked ♩ = 108–112. Furthermore, most of the tempo indications follow the very traditional parameters and terminology, in their most succinct and generic form. Examples of traditional indications found in the score—to give just a few—are: *Presto* (at the very beginning of the opera); *Allegro* (at the top of Act I, scene 5); *Andante quasi lento* (at the top of Act II); *Vivace* (at measure 69 of Act II, scene 2). Some others are not in the traditional, nineteenth-century table of tempo indications, but they still use terms extremely common in modern practice, such as *Cantabile* (measure 231, Act II, scene 1), *Giocoso* (measure 169, Act II, scene 1), *Deciso* (in a couple of instances). They also maintain the traditional and exclusive use of Italian. The only “original” tempo indication in *A Room with a View* is *Espansiva* (the first time at measure 6 of the first scene of the opera). This indication presents an interesting application of the Italian word “espansivo,” and notably recurs a few times in the opera, always in association with Lucy’s very romantic, “expansive” musical motive in parallel thirds. The Italian “espansivo” properly means “outgoing” and “affectionate,” and it is exclusively used in reference to a person, to indicate a personality trait. It would not normally be applicable to an object, a situation, or the description of a sentiment. I suspect that Nelson is here literally translating the English “expansive,” which instead would have a proper application in reference to describing the character of a musical passage. Furthermore, he is interestingly—and I think purposely, for the association with the female lead character—using the feminine ending of the adjective.

This, as I summarized it, is the extent of the range and variety of tempo indications in the score, and it is in a way a surprising fact in a piece of music written in the 1990s. Conductors approaching the study of a contemporary score are ready to face a huge and complex variety of indications, often in the native language of the composer. In general, a contemporary score is likely to present a very detailed and hyper-descriptive notation, which sometimes can become cumbersome. Indeed, in regard to tempo markings and other descriptive indications, this is not even such a contemporary practice, as it has a pioneer in the late Beethoven, and was then exploited to the extreme by Mahler in his symphonic scores. Nelson’s use of tempo indications is extremely traditional in this sense. From my

standpoint of conductor studying the score, while the lack of metronome markings could lead to some imprecision in interpreting the composer's intention, and could fail to satisfy the interpreter's need for an exact guidance in the choice of tempi, it never presented itself as a troubling aspect of my preparation. Nelson's choice falls in the context of a traditional practice of tempo indications as non-prescriptive of the absolute speed of execution, but rather descriptive of the musical character of the passage. In building my own interpretation of *A Room with a View*, I fully embraced and benefitted from the freedom left to explore different solutions, research the structural and dramatic ramifications of tempo choices, and focus on the expressive aspects of the music in a way more intuitive and poetic rather than "scientific."

As a conductor approaching the issue of tempi during the study stage, I have to mediate between three main parameters:

- the character of the music, in the sense of its dramatic, emotional, and ideal content, as I interpret it based on the score;
- considerations of pacing, proportions, and structural balance, from the small formal unit to the overall arch of the piece;
- the practical issues deriving from the execution of a specific passage, from a merely instrumental standpoint, and partly in anticipation of the expected ability of the players.

In reference to this last parameter, a typical case of idiomatic instrumental writing that, based on the prescribed character and articulation, implies a natural tempo of execution, is found in extended passages in *spiccato* for the strings—where the natural speed of the bow bouncing on the string does not allow for a huge flexibility in choosing the appropriate tempo. One exemplary passage of *A Room with a View* in this sense is the section at measure 203 in Act I, scene 1.

After the study, and in the concrete situation of rehearsing the music with instrumentalists and vocalists, a number of practical issues come into play to further affect the conductor's choice of tempi: these range from the acoustics of the hall to the playing abilities of the orchestra or skills of the singers (breath support and endurance of a singer may often dictate the performance speed of a passage). The Michigan State University production did not present substantial problems in relation to these practical issues. Besides indicating the good quality and high level of preparation of orchestra and singers of the Michigan State University Opera Theater, the natural way in which the music of *A Room with*

a View has come to life in that context speaks in my opinion to Nelson's compositional craft, the idiomatic quality of his writing, and the clarity with which his musical intentions are expressed in the score.

In terms of tempo choices, during the rehearsal process Nelson pointed out that he did not agree with one of my decisions. The music in question is in the very first scene of Act I, starting at measure 26, during the dinner conversation among the guests of the Bertolini pension.⁵⁴ Interestingly, this is one of the few instances where a metronome marking is suggested: ♩ = 88 ca. Furthermore, the tempo indication is a little more descriptive than others in the score, reading *Moderato—con grande eleganza*. The charming character of this 3/4 music, and the texture of the pizzicato accompaniment under a violin line, gently spinning around with a repeated rhythmic punctuation, leave no doubt as to the nature of the music: it is certainly a dance, and everything would also suggest that it can be interpreted as a background, sort of “salon music” playing underneath the casual conversation. But what dance? Notwithstanding the metronome marking, my interpretation was that this section represents a waltz. This reading was based on a strong feeling of the pulse “in one,” and on a need to secure a flowing pace to the scene and a sense of liveliness to the first presentation of the characters and their active exchange of lines. I chose a faster tempo than the one indicated, at around ♩ = 104. During the rehearsals in Michigan, Nelson advocated for the intention expressed with the slower tempo indication. He remarked that this should be a calmer and more stylized idea of dance, suggestive, for example, of a gavotte. Even the ternary meter, which would not suggest a gavotte, is in fact often contradicted by the recurring rhythmic displacements in the accompaniment. The entire tone of the scene and the conversation changes this way, to more properly reflect the atmosphere of the novel, and the stylized, manufactured character of the “Britisher abroad,”⁵⁵ always moving within uptight societal conventions.

Another issue that a conductor encounters in the study of the score is tempo relationships and transitions. In *A Room with a View*, I was rarely presented with problematic instances in this sense. In large part, this is motivated by the characteristic way the opera is constructed, through juxtaposition of fairly distinct and squarely cut musical sections. There

⁵⁴ See Example 6, in Appendix Two, 73–77.

⁵⁵ I am quoting here Miss Lavish's disdainful comment in measures 62–63 of Act I, scene 2.

is a minimal level of structural fluidity in this score, posing equally minimal problems to the conductor in managing tempo on a structural level. One of the few examples of transitions to be solved from a purely technical standpoint is between measures 202 and 203 in Act I, scene 1, from the *Moderato* in 3/4 to the *Allegro* in 6/8. Without prescribing a mathematical tempo relationship, Nelson provides a simple technical solution to the transition, through the indication of an *accelerando* at the beginning of measure 202, and the writing of a triplet for the violin part on the last beat of the bar. It is quite clear that the triplet anticipates the ternary subdivision of the following section, to prepare the player for the new rhythmic gesture, while a relationship of $\downarrow = \downarrow \downarrow$ is suggested through the *accelerando*.⁵⁶

Throughout the process of score study I gradually became familiar with some of the specific aspects of Nelson's operatic writing style. I would like to review and synthesize them in a systematic way.⁵⁷

A large part of the score features a compositional approach that I will call the "orchestral theme" style. The writing presents a clear distinction between the instrumental and vocal components, resorting to a "theme" in the orchestra, to which the vocal lines are super-imposed. I am defining "theme" as an element or constructive material that can be identified as the "subject" of the musical discourse, exactly like a topic in a conversation. Nelson's characteristic writing produces a recurrent pattern in the orchestra part, both on the motivic and vertical level, which constitutes the building block of a musical section. The section is entirely derived from this basic material, and often develops in a regular phrase structure through a defined harmonic path. I have already mentioned one example of this, in the dance-like music of the conversation at the dinner table in the first scene.⁵⁸ In that case, the "theme" or "subject" of the musical discourse is the orchestral dance. Very interestingly, in all sections that present this compositional style, the orchestra can be perceived as a background to the voices. The vocal lines still relate to the accompaniment according to traditional rhythmic and harmonic constraints, but appear distinct and independent from a structural standpoint. They do not dictate the form, but respond to purely textual necessities.

⁵⁶ See Example 7, in Appendix Two, 78.

⁵⁷ In the second chapter of his dissertation, Shomos's descriptive analysis of the music in *A Room* provides an extended discussion of the different compositional styles utilized in the score: Shomos, 19–280. My aim here is to present them in a schematic way.

⁵⁸ See again Example 6, in Appendix Two, 73–77.

This appears to be a musical reflection of the structure of the libretto and of the abundance in it of what Nelson calls “expository dialogue.” The way the vocal lines are composed in these sections is an immediate translation of speech in many respects: they are strictly syllabic, clearly reflecting inflection and accentuation, and, again, are perceived to be freely “floating” over the orchestral background. The effect is so drastic that the music in the orchestra is very close to assuming a diegetic function. Both from an immediate aural standpoint and after a deeper study of the score, the prevailing element in these sections appears to be the orchestral one. The orchestra provides structure and recognizable musical material; it offers the “theme” of the discourse; it clarifies the character of the situation, and, in addition, often depicts a distinct atmosphere through instrumental colors. Paradoxically, from the intended background function, the orchestra risks sounding to the listener like a character of the drama even in these sections, where its role should be downplayed. Instead, the vocal lines, presenting a melodic contour often angular, less recognizable and scarcely “tuneful” in a traditional sense, tend to be “sucked” into the background.

A very substantial part of *A Room with a View* presents this compositional style: scenes 1 and 5 in Act I, 1 and 2 in Act II, and large portions of scenes 4 and 6 in Act I, and 3, 4 and 6 in Act II. In my score studying this was an important factor, because one of the first stages of my process when working on an opera is the exclusive study of the vocal lines, completely out of their context. In the musical sections presenting the “orchestral theme” style it was more challenging for me to learn and absorb the vocal parts.

The other styles present in *A Room with a View* are:

- a recitative or declamatory style, where the voice either alternates with orchestral punctuations and “commentary,” in the fashion of a traditional *accompagnato* (for example: Act I, scene 4), or proceeds more fluidly over orchestral sustained chords (mostly string), with rhythmic and agogic freedom (for example: Act II, scene 5);
- what I would like to call a “voice *obbligato*” style. The vocal line becomes an integral part of the orchestral texture, and behaves as an instrument of the ensemble in presenting the same motivic elements, articulation, character, and structure. The voice is often doubled by an orchestral instrument. Examples of this style are the two interludes represented by Miss Alan 1 and Miss Alan 2 in Act I, scene 1, and the often-mentioned gossip sequence in Act I, scene 5;

- and finally, the most typical of the operatic styles—which we could call the “aria-like” style. In this type of writing, the vocal line is the dominating element. It presents a non-speech-inflected exposition of the text (normally also a non-syllabic one, but not in Nelson’s style). It has a recognizable and appealing melodic contour, defines the dramatic and emotional arch of the section, and mostly dictates the form and the other main musical components. Remarkably, this is not the prevalent style used in *A Room with a View*. Two of the most extended examples of it are in fact the two numbers added to the libretto at a later time, Lucy’s aria in Act I, scene 6, and the Act II trio (Act II, scene 4).

Leading into the conclusion of my study process and the first moment of actual music making on *A Room with a View*, the different impact of the mentioned compositional styles immediately emerged during my work with the singers.

At the end of September 2015 I was involved in a first, preliminary phase of the Michigan State University production, as I worked with singers in coaching sessions for a short period of ten days. A conductor is not always involved in the early stages of preparation of the singers; but, in this case, doing so allowed me to understand and confront some musical issues well in advance.

These coachings were the occasion for the correction of a number of typographical errors in the vocal parts, and a few discrepancies between the piano vocal and the orchestral score. The matter of proof reading a musical score, and offering reliable study materials to the performers, is for the composer not a marginal one in the stages after the composition of a piece. We know from experience how this process can be problematic and potentially frustrating for a composer: Nelson’s case with *A Room with a View* is not an exception, as he admitted in our conversations. Furthermore, in a production of a piece of music, the reliability, exactness, and visual quality of scores and parts can play a crucial role in the efficiency of the rehearsal process, mainly due to normal time constraints. Even if rarely mentioned, this issue is a regular part of a conductor’s professional experience, and some times affects the success of his work in rehearsals. When I notified Nelson of the mistakes, he was very grateful to me for having identified and corrected them. He was equally surprised to learn about their presence, as the score had already gone through stages of proof reading after the 2004 revision. We also consulted on the few discrepancies, and settled them together.

My work with the singers exposed some challenging aspects of the score. The vocal requirements of *A Room with a View* in technical terms of voice types, weight, agility, appear fairly approachable for a cast of young singers. The rich texture of the full orchestral scoring probably calls for large, more mature and dramatic voices in the lead roles. But thanks to the very favorable acoustic conditions for singing in the Fairchild Theater at Michigan State University, this did not represent a problematic aspect in the end.

Instead, a real challenge is the extended tonal language of the opera, which appears almost atonal when one considers the isolated vocal parts. The angular melodic contour of some of the lines and the frequent lack of an intuitive and recognizable support in the accompaniment, from a rhythmic, harmonic, or structural standpoint, put continuously to the test the abilities and preparation of the young singers of the Michigan State University Opera program. Remarkably, the most evident difficulty in absorbing and memorizing the vocal lines emerged in many of the sections featuring the “orchestral theme” style.

The role of Lucy is certainly the most extended, technically demanding, and also challenging from an interpretive and emotional standpoint. Together with the role of Mr. Emerson, it is the part in the opera that most requires artistic maturity and experience in the performer. The role of Cecil features very specific difficulties. The writing of his vocal line is particularly challenging for its over-abundant use of dissonant intervals and large leaps, and its harmonic instability, often receiving little aural support from the orchestra. This writing, nevertheless, presents its own very expressive nature, as it intends to musically reflect Cecil’s odd, elusive, and conceited personality.

All of these challenges reflected themselves in my initial work with the singers, often calling me to the role of teacher and educator in aiding the learning process. If this initially happened at the expense of a complete focus on the poetic and interpretive aspects of my music-making, in the end we were able to accomplish remarkable musical results in the performances, and achieve a satisfactory level of expressivity and dramatic delivery. In performance, the students revealed their talent and potentials in matching the level of expectations, and offered a product of professional standard and quality. Nevertheless, my individual work with them was very intense, requiring patience and understanding on my part. In many cases, I had to address basic rhythmic difficulties, and guide the singers through a gradual, step-by-step process. With some students, I needed to compensate for

flaws in their learning methods, and provide very contextualized solutions to each of the concrete issues they encountered in the musical realization of their parts.

Two of the most challenging sections in the score are related by a similar difficulty for the singers: the absence of a solid support in the orchestral part from the metric and structural standpoint.

The first one is in the opening of the fourth scene in Act II. The section presents a very irregular phrase structure, in its unpredictable alternation of short metric units, complicated by a thick contrapuntal texture with constantly repeating and heavily accented rhythmic motives. This results in a continuous metric displacement, giving the sensation of a “lack of downbeats.” Furthermore, the section implies a very agitated character, corresponding to Lucy’s outburst of angst. From a staging standpoint, it requires Lucy to rush onto the stage and start singing in a matter of few seconds.⁵⁹ The passage proved very challenging for both of the students in the role. I often had to correct their wrong entrances in this section, and, even with my coaching, they could not gain a solid mastery of it. The inability to efficiently solve this musical issue resulted in the evident frustration of the young singers. Being in an educational situation, I had to provide them with not only my musical assistance, but also emotional support throughout the process.

The second example is in the last scene of the opera (Act II, scene 8). In this final duet between Lucy and George, featuring a long solo for the male character, the orchestral writing presents a typical and repeated displacement of accents. A sixteenth-note at the end of each beat is tied to the following on-the-beat note, tricking the ear into perceiving a rhythmic articulation on the sixteenth-note. The character of the music is completely different than in the previous section: calm, ethereal, suffused with a warm and delicate light. But the difficulty is similar, as the orchestral accompaniment constantly misleads the singer with false rhythmic points of reference.⁶⁰ One of the two students playing the role of George particularly feared this scene. Once more, besides my work with him in coaching sessions and my help during rehearsals and performances (through very marked conducting gestures and cuing), a crucial part of our final success was my facilitating self-trust and confidence in the student.

⁵⁹ Example 8, in Appendix Two, 79–81.

⁶⁰ Example 9, in Appendix Two, 82.

I found this initial stage of the production very helpful, as it allowed me to confront some concrete issues in advance, and plan successful strategies in my musical direction of the project. In addition, even if mastering the technical aspects of the score occupied most of the time during this first work period, I was able to test some of my interpretive ideas, and in some cases to further elaborate them through the live process of music rehearsals. This was an essential part of my experience with *A Room with a View*: I believe that my main contribution to the “extended creative process” of this opera was in my original interpretive additions to the score, much more than in the few minor cuts that resulted from the production.

My first in-person encounter with Robert Nelson was in a rehearsal room of the College of Music at the Michigan State University, in November 2015. At that point in my experience with *A Room with a View*, I had been studying the score for about five months, had already coached all singers on their parts for weeks, had conducted staging rehearsals of the opera, and had already led a few orchestral readings of the score. I was definitely familiar with the music, but not yet with the man.

The immediate first impression I received from him was of great calm: some sort of inner state of peace was transpiring from his persona—balanced, yet vibrant. Nelson was quiet and discrete in presence. He approached that situation—the first rehearsal of the piece happening with the composer present—with a deferent and respectful attitude. He implicitly set the tone for our subsequent collaboration along the lines of “I will be in a corner listening, please do your work and do not worry about me.” But in that first encounter I noticed how Nelson’s glance was incredibly intense, and his eyes showed a constant emotional engagement and a spirited quality. When I offered him a chair for the rehearsal, his answer was: “I prefer to stand, I am used to pacing back and forth while listening.”

Nelson was in East Lansing for about twenty days, which included the last three orchestral readings, production week (with a *sitzprobe*, a “tech” rehearsal, a piano dress rehearsal, and two orchestra dress rehearsals), and four performances (at the Fairchild Theater of the MSU Auditorium, from November 18 to 22, 2015). Over this period of time, the two of us did not have a chance to spend a large amount of time together outside of our working hours. Besides a few social occasions, our long interview on November 13 was the sole opportunity for a more personal and human exchange. Practical circumstances partly dictated this, and partly, I suspect, this also came from the nature of our personalities, which

share a main trait: a reserved and reflective character, generally introverted, with a tendency to express emotions through channels other than verbal communication. In our interview, which took the form of a pleasant, friendly conversation over a cup of coffee, I found myself very much at ease with Nelson, and had a clear feeling that this experience was mutual. The element of personality is one of the key factors of a successful artistic collaboration, as I have mentioned before. In my rapport with Nelson, this element was never problematic. On the contrary, it was probably an essential condition of our successful collaboration. We both have a very agreeable temperament, and an open and collaborative attitude; in addition, our artistic and musical vision naturally and immediately aligned since our first encounter.

In the case of two reserved personalities like Nelson's and mine, our human connection was more often expressed through music than through words or actions. This was a constant in my experience with *A Room with a View*, from my study of the score to the Michigan production. One of the most meaningful moments in my relationship with Nelson happened during an orchestra rehearsal, in that same room where I first met him. After an intense work session on the very last scene of the opera, during which I had rehearsed the orchestral part in great detail, both technical and expressive, and had searched with passion for a poetic result, we played through the scene one last time. Then I turned to the composer who was standing behind my back, to see tears in his eyes and a luminous expression on his face. He just said a few words about how previous performances of this music had never been completely effective. But the way he was genuinely moved by our music-making was not only very rewarding for me from the professional standpoint of a conductor, but also deeply meaningful from the perspective of our human connection.

There were never problems in managing the more practical aspects of my working relationship with Nelson. The division of roles was a crucial element, which never needed any discussion in our case, and naturally followed implicit rules that we both agreed on. When performing contemporary music, the intervention of the composer in the rehearsal process is a delicate matter, especially in the cases where it may interfere or exert an over-controlling pressure on the work of the conductor. I distinctly recall a piece of advice received in the early years of my conducting studies from my very first teacher: he warned me to never invite the composer to a rehearsal of his music. This seemed both counter-intuitive and too extreme to me at the time. But, with experience, I have come to recognize

this issue as a very sensible one, which needs at least to be evaluated case by case. In the case of *A Room with a View*, Nelson assumed a role of listener/spectator and advisor. He had a sincere appreciation for my work, and never interfered with any aspect of the process, from my methods to the final results. Furthermore, he received my interpretation with respect and support, and provided comments in the form of discreet suggestions, always given at the end of a rehearsal session, and in the context of a consultation between two musicians on an equal level.

As it is evident from my account, all aspects of a fruitful collaboration between composer and conductor were present in my relationship with Robert Nelson, creating the ideal conditions for an efficient working relationship.

A very important element in the team of professionals involved in an opera production is the figure of the stage director, who is called to closely collaborate with the conductor. In the Michigan State University production, the enormous contribution given by Melanie Helton was not simply a crucial factor in the successful outcome, but a vital precondition to the very existence of the project. She not only was the stage director, but is the director of the opera program at MSU. She acts on the one hand as producer, organizer, creator, supervisor of the productions (and covers many other minor but necessary roles), and on the other as mentor and vocal advisor to all the singers involved. In the case of *A Room with a View*, her previous knowledge of the opera and life-long personal connection with the librettist Buck Ross was the reason itself for the project to be conceived.

While it is beyond my scope to delve into the matters of stage direction and of my relationship to Helton (which is anyway a wonderful one, very friendly and collaborative), in these last few paragraphs I want to mention some practical aspects of the Michigan production because of their direct effect on the performances on one side, and on the minor adjustments to the score on the other.

The production utilized a single and basic architectural element for the scenery, positioned in the center of the stage and presenting a division into two levels. The lower level featured an archway and a door; the upper, a balcony. The two levels were connected by a staircase on “stage left,” and a large curved ramp on “stage right.” This set did not require any shift of scenery throughout the opera, providing the sense of the different settings through the use of projections on a backdrop. The two-level structure offered very helpful resources in the staging of some sections. For example, in the double duet in Act II,

scene 1, originally conceived as an on-stage dialogue between Freddy and Mrs. Honeychurch, overlapping with an off-stage one between Cecil and Lucy, the use of the two levels proved to be a perfect solution. It visually and spatially separated the two duets, while avoiding the problematic aspects of coordination of on-stage and off-stage singing from a musical standpoint.

Generally speaking, the simplicity of the technical requirements of the staging and the absence of set transitions solved the issue of the constant changing of location in each scene of the opera. They also allowed for a better dramatic flow, and avoided many potential problems that often arise from a practical standpoint of “pit–stage” coordination and orchestral transitions. In this sense, my successful work as conductor was greatly facilitated by the technical characteristics of the production.

A couple of situations that required attention were the orchestral prelude to scene 3 of Act I, “The River,” and the second scene of Act II, “The Bathe.” In the first case, the music is descriptive of a silent scene, a homicide witnessed by Lucy. Nelson provides specific indications in the score as to the musical moments that need to correspond to the various stages of the action. It is essential that the dramatic commentary of the orchestra is perfectly synchronized with what we see happening on the stage. In some cases, a situation of this kind will require adjustments on the part of the conductor in the pacing of the orchestral music. I have often found myself in this position, and had to solve the issue “from the pit.” This possibility was initially discussed by Nelson and me in this scene. Eventually, the issue was solved through the consultation between the composer and the stage director, and the correction of timing and other parameters of the staging, without the need of any adjustments on my part. In the case of the “Bathe,” the description of the lively scene at the pond, where the three male characters get naked, happily swim, and then childishly run around, was rendered by Helton through the use of a front scrim, which in addition to the back projection would give a visual feeling of a “watery” environment on the stage. While effectively realizing a problematic scene from a staging standpoint, this solution presented some challenges from the musical standpoint. In the context of a fast-paced music with a fairly elaborate contrapuntal texture in the orchestra, rhythmically combined with fragmented singing of lines that has to happen while the characters are going through all the mentioned actions on the stage, the presence of the scrim impeded a good contact between me and the singers, both visually and aurally. Given the nature of the music in this section, I

requested a solution from the staging standpoint. After consultations between Helton and me, slight adjustments made to the staging, and specific instructions given to the singers, the issue was successfully resolved in rehearsal. One last technical issue intrinsic to the score is the presence of piano solo passages, at times overlapping with singing, to represent Lucy playing the piano in scenes 3 and 6 of Act II. The staging realization of these scenes utilized a fake piano on the stage, on which the singer in the role of Lucy pretended to play. There were two possible options for the placement of the actual orchestral piano: either backstage (and coordinating with the conductor through video monitors), or in the pit. I immediately opted for the second solution, anticipating relevant problems of musical coordination in the scenes in question. In fact, those problems occurred, and my choice appeared successful in the final realization.

While I have mentioned these episodes only to account for the few exceptions to a very unproblematic production process, I conclude my exposition by discussing the way some practical circumstances resulted in a few minor changes in the score.

These are the revisions made to the score of *A Room with a View* for the 2015 Michigan performances:

- Interlude 1 in Act I was cut;
- two fermatas were added in the score, at measure 235 in Act II, scene 2, and at measure 1 in Act II, scene 3;
- Interlude 4 in Act II was cut;
- measure 49 in Act II, scene 4 was changed from a 4/4 bar to a 2/4 bar, cutting its first half;
- the orchestral interlude between measure 135 and measure 146 of Act II, scene 5 was cut.

All of these changes but one were motivated by staging needs. The cut sections were mostly intended by the composer to provide music for stage transitions and set shifting, which were not needed in the Michigan production. The opportunity to leave this music in our performances was discussed by Nelson and me: we agreed to make the cuts for the sake of brevity and dramatic flow. In the case of the fermatas, instead, the issue in question was the timing of a costume change, which required a longer musical transition. The solution was suggested by me and approved by Nelson. The only change not motivated by staging needs was the shortening of measure 49 in Act II, scene 4. This change addressed a purely musical issue, and was made for structural reasons: both Nelson and I felt that the original version

was metrically unjustified and dramatically ineffective. To confirm Nelson’s approach to our artistic collaboration, all the above changes were decided in consultation, and ultimately left by the composer to my musical judgment and final approval as music director of the project.

I have mentioned these changes to describe the way the concrete needs and practical circumstances of a production can marginally affect the evolution over time of a piece of music. While it is safe to assume that the changes related to staging needs will remain temporary and circumstantial, I imagine that the correction of measure 49 in Act II, scene 4 will become a permanent one, and can be categorized as a 2015 revision to the score.

In relation to my personal contribution to the Michigan production, I want to finally evaluate my interpretive additions to the score. In discussing the “extended creative process” of *A Room with a View*, I have identified one instance in which my input as conductor can be considered as creative.

My modifications in Lucy’s aria (Act I, scene 6) have in my opinion a potential to qualify as a stage of the “extended creative process” of this opera, however marginal. My interpretation of this number seemed to satisfy the composer, and have his tacit approval.

The aria proper starts at measure 118, and it has a free and through-composed structure.⁶¹ The form combines a late romantic operatic style with some features of a musical theatre song. My interpretation adds tempo changes and noticeable agogic modifications. They are motivated by considerations of structural and dramatic nature, and related to parameters of expressivity strictly deduced from the textual content. The tempo indication at measure 118 is *Poco agitato*: the marking applies to the entirety of the number. The motivic figure initiated in the first bar by the celli, with its peculiar details of articulation and its expressive quality, dictates a starting tempo with limited possibilities of fluctuation. My choice was to start toward the slower end of that range (I underlined *Poco* in the tempo indication), in order to create a tone of mystery and expectation, and also to allow for greater possibilities of dramatic progression over the whole aria. My first revision is a *Più mosso* at measure 137, marking the beginning of a new section. Two measures later I marked a *Molto agitato*. This corresponds to Lucy’s first emotional outburst, which temporarily dissipates after a climax at measure 145 (marked by the high B flat in the vocal line). For this reason, I added a *rallentando* at measure 146 over three bars, to transition back to a *Tempo primo* that I

⁶¹ Example 10, in Appendix Two, 83–88.

indicated at measure 149 (corresponding to the literal return of the cello figure of the beginning). In measure 151, a second sudden outburst seems to start, marked by the ascending figure in the first violins: I added again a *Più mosso* in this bar. The most compelling reason for my interpretation is in the dramatic nature of the moment, representing the conflicted, tormented soliloquy of an emotionally repressed young woman, unable to completely confront her innermost feelings. Lucy's troubled state of mind results in mounting agitation and subsequent sudden explosions. In fact, the crucial junctures of the text are marked with the repeated exclamation "No!"—unexpected and uncontrolled. All my added tempo indications occur on the "No!" measures, as mentioned above (measures 137, 145, and 151).

The last marking I added in the aria is towards its end, between measure 204 and measure 208: my personal copy of the score reads here "pressing, urgent," implying a sudden and dramatic *accelerando*.⁶² This change, which might appear unimportant, results in a completely different effect than in the original, *a tempo* version. The reason for my choice is expressive, based on the very explicit emotional content of this moment, and mainly related to musical considerations of structure and texture. The structural aspect is that the repetition of one of the most dramatically intense lines in the aria (here and before at measures 172–176) invokes, in my opinion, a variation in the second occurrence. The line reads: "If this is love I don't want it. If this is hell I believe it." While the melodic contour and pitches are almost literally repeated, the irregular metric structure is corrected in the repetition. The odd 4/4 measure inserted in the middle of the passage in the first occurrence is here normalized to a 3/4 measure. The missing beat strongly suggests a momentum forward of the phrase. Finally, the texture of the orchestral accompaniment, with the use of dramatic *tremolos* across the string section, leaves no doubt as to the sense of incredible urgency and emotional loss of control that this moment represents.

The "extended creative process" of *A Room with a View* and my artistic collaboration with Nelson on this recent production of the opera present many similarities with both the historical cases I discussed in the first chapter. The changes made to the score of Copland's *Third Symphony* address the excessive length of the final movement by making cuts. Almost

⁶² Example 11, in Appendix Two, 89.

all revisions to *A Room with a View* throughout its performance history consist in cuts to Act II, and often to the final scene, in order to shorten the second part of the opera. In addition, my relationship with Nelson could be compared to that between Copland and Bernstein, for the mutual respect and understanding and the human and emotional connection between the two individuals involved. I cannot find as many similarities with the collaboration between Toscanini and Puccini: the human aspects of that relationship appear different than those of my relationship with Nelson. But many moments and details of the story of the Metropolitan premiere of *Fanciulla* truly resonate with my experience with *A Room with a View*. The context is similar: the production of a new or recent opera by a living composer, who participates in the rehearsal process. In particular, the historical cases and mine are both powerful examples of the complexity of the process of producing opera, and of the remarkable impact of practical circumstances (from staging needs to the acoustics of the performance space) on several of the decisions made toward the final product by the artists involved, even on the level of score revisions. As to the conductor's revisions to the score, both the Copland–Koussevitzky–Bernstein and the Puccini–Toscanini examples are very similar to my experience with Nelson's opera: tempo indications and expressive markings represent a substantial amount of the conductor's personal interventions in the creative process.

I conclude here by saying that it is hard to anticipate the future of *A Room with a View* and its potential for gaining a wider audience. Hopefully this opera will be produced and performed on a more consistent basis, both at the college and professional levels. If I cannot expect that my additions in the last scene of Act I result in permanent revisions to the score (unless the composer makes a specific decision in that direction), I can imagine that they might at least become part of the future performance practice of the opera, and could maybe contribute to its “tradition” as an interpretive reference.

APPENDIX ONE

Transcripts of the in-person interview with Robert Nelson in East Lansing, Michigan, on November 13, 2016.

MC: Mr. Nelson, what would you define as the starting point of your operatic career?

RN: I was at University of Nebraska, and this would have been in the late 50s. Beadell, my composition teacher, had composed a number of operas, one of which specifically was produced while I was there, and I ended up playing in the pit, I was a trumpet player at the time and played in the pit. I got very interested in it at that time, because I saw basically how interested he was

MC: Do you recall what was the name of the opera you played in?

RN: The opera I played in was something like “The incident at...” some place in the West.

MC: Do you think it’s an opera that I might be able to dig up?

RN: You might find it, it kind of got a production at the University of Nebraska and then it disappeared. So I got interested in it, and again, got to witness first hand the frustration he had getting operas produced and getting in the hands of people.

MC: Would you say that a lot has changed since the late 50s in those issues?

RN: I have not seen much changed.

MC: So we can say that the composers are facing more or less the same issues. But if anything changed, I would have assumed in worse, so that was the point of my question.

RN: Well, I don’t think things are any worse, but I don't think they have improved.

So, then I did my doctoral work at the University of Southern California. My composition teacher was Ingolf Dahl—I specifically went out there to study with him. And I told him I was very interested in opera, and that I wanted my doctoral dissertation to be an opera, and so, the first thing he said: “Well, if you are going to write opera, you got to experience opera kind of from the inside.” And so he sent me to Walter Ducloux, who was on the faculty at USC at the time, and said “Well if you want to write an opera, you better get some experience coaching and conducting,” and so I enrolled in Ducloux’s conducting class, also took his opera history class. But in his conducting class, particularly, his attitude was that if you wanted to be a conductor, you learned your skills in the opera pit, and so much of the time that we had been in his conducting class, was coaching and conducting, you know, opera excerpts. So I got a great deal of experience sort of that way and so I eventually did my dissertation. It was a full-length opera called *The Commission*, which has never been completely produced. I had a friend in London, actually, and we were able to do kind of a studio performance of most of it, so I got a chance to at least get a substantial amount of it up on its feet, so I could see what was working and what was still problematic.

MC: Could we spend just a minute briefly talking about *The Commission*, just to see a couple of things: where the libretto came from, what the topic was, and how you see that as your first step in writing opera in comparison to what has happened after?

RN: The libretto was done by a guy by the name of Stan Peters, who had done a number of librettos for Bob Beadell, so I knew him through Beadell, and I knew he had experience working with opera. So I figured he had some skill in knowing how to construct a libretto. The story of “The commission” was original. It wasn’t adapted from anything, so Stan had freedom with it. It was interesting because, obviously, since this was my dissertation piece, Ingolf had quite a say in what he thought of the libretto, and he raised some very serious issues about the dramatic structure of the libretto. His big complaint was that we were having too many things happen off stage so to speak, and his belief, which I have come to agree very strongly with, is that if you want something to have dramatic impact it has to happen on the stage, it has to be integrated into the piece. And so he required us to add an additional scene in which we could give a dramatic presence to things that were crucial. It was just excellent advice. We went along with it and the new scene that we had I think is probably the strongest scene in the opera.

MC: So why originally there was a great deal of things happening off stage? Was there a special reason for that?

RN: This was basically the story: it involves some kind of a triangle, with this painter, infatuated with a singer, and it turns out the singer was infatuated with another singer of the same sex, and presented a certain dilemma for the painter. So he takes his revenge by painting a very sort of graphic and obscene portrait of her, which he puts on display, and it was that part that Ingolf decided it needed to be integrated. In other words you couldn’t just have everybody say: “Well, did you see that painting?” So the scene that we added was essentially a scene in the gallery, where the painting was there and everybody would be reacting to it, and that was the point that he felt that was so critical to what happened at the end of the opera.

MC: And I assume that originally it was thought to be off stage also for fear of appropriateness of the subject and all the implications of the sexual triangle, same sex love and so forth.

RN: But it was very important that that all be brought out, and Ingolf felt, and I kind of had to agree with it, that you couldn’t just talk about it: it had to be something that was dramatized.

MC: Now, to close with “The Commission,” do you see any seeds of what you became as an opera composer in that first experiment? It is very hard, I know, for the author himself to trace the stages of his development, but I think it’s a question I have to ask.

RN: One of the things that I had already made up my mind on, and I think this is partly because, again, I grew up with Verdi, was that opera needs structure: it needs musical structure and dramatic structure. Dramatic structure tends to be almost a given but I think, too many contemporary composers have lost the sense of musical structure. So at that time, working with Stan, we tried to structure the libretto in such a way so that I could build set pieces: even though there was a kind of a continual flow, there was a sense of certain things beginning and certain things ending. I felt like it needed arias, it needed ensembles, and so literally we just built set pieces, and that has pretty much stayed with me. That has been something that I have felt pretty strongly about, and have tried to build on that. So I started with that, and of course, part of that, and part of my training, when I was doing my doctoral degree, was developing the musical technique and the compositional technique to make that work without necessarily going to a piece where you have interpolated dialogue and so forth and so on—which I have done some of that too.

MC: Talking now about *A Room with a View*: can we talk about the choosing of the subject and the entire process that leads somebody into then getting in touch with the librettist (or maybe the librettist had the idea?), the relationship between the composer and the librettist, and how you think all these things and the issues related are somewhat what they would have been at the time of Verdi talking with his librettists, Romani or Solera...

RN: It is an interesting story about the way this worked. *A Room with a View* was Buck Ross's idea. Of course I knew Buck and had been sort of agitating with him and I had made it very clear to him that, you know, I was very interested in doing opera and so he, one day, sort of came to me and says "Well I have got this idea for an opera based on *A Room with a View*: would you be interested in doing the music?" And of course, obviously, I didn't have to think very long about that. So actually he had come up with the idea, and it seemed like a good idea. Just a perfect story, it had just the right requirements in terms of number of singers. We figured we could do a chamber orchestra, and we were thinking almost from the very beginning about the practical ramifications. We had a couple of meetings very early on where we talked about the characters, which was very useful to me. We decided at that time what voice parts would be assigned... and I think the most interesting decision that we made—which I think it was definitely the right one—was assigning... making the romantic lead a baritone, as opposed to tenor, because I don't think that there was ever any question that Cecil and Mr. Eager had to be tenors, just had to be!

MC: So Eager is a tenor like Basilio is a tenor in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, sort of slimy...?

RN: Absolutely! Although there is this possibility: because of the way the piece is structured—Mr Eager is only in Act I, Cecil is only in Act II—we thought from the very beginning that it could be one singer that could do both, and also for a tenor would be just so much fun because they are different enough characters. But as it turns out, we have never done that. We did a recording of a concert version and we had Joey Evans do both roles, he could do that.

MC: So that was a process in close collaboration with the librettist. What role does tradition play in that sense?

RN: It's interesting how without even thinking about it there were certain stereotypes that sort of presented themselves. Although I think in some sense the main characters in *A Room with a View* are a bit more complex, but I don't think Buck and I ever... they just seemed to be so natural, so we never had to really talk too much about voice parts. A lot of what we had to talk about was: what kind of people these are like. But it was so obvious that Miss Lavish was exactly what her name suggests. The two characters that have the most depth are certainly Mr. Emerson, and secondarily George. But I found myself very much attracted to Mr. Emerson.

MC: So in a way the depth of the character and the personality calls, in some sort of metaphor, for a deeper voice?

RN: Yes, and so from the very beginning we thought of Mr. Emerson as a bass-baritone. The first draft that Buck brought to me—I took one look at it and I said: "I can't do this," because he had written out long lines, basically like prose. So he came up with a second draft and it was exactly the same word for word but he had broken it up in smaller lines, and all of a sudden it looked like poetry: "Now I can do it!"

MC: It makes me think again about traditional opera, where the verse structure in the libretto already calls for recitatives versus closed numbers and so forth. And as a composer you need to have a metric or rhythmic organization of the piece.

RN: It was interesting. Buck I don't think was thinking so much in terms of set pieces: that wasn't his concern, he was just concerned about what needed to be in there to establish the characters, and to move the plot along... But we decided that there needed to be musical numbers, so he actually created them himself. He created Lucy's aria at the end of Act I, and he created the trio in Act II, so those are pure Buck Ross, those are not... strictly speaking... you won't find them in the Forster. So he understood that those pieces needed to be in there. I discovered that, for the way that he had structured the libretto, it was very easy to find these set pieces. You can see that in scene 1, for

example, the scene at the dinner table: it sort of breaks itself down into sections, there is the conversation, then there are the two Miss Alans, so it just lends itself to it. The only line that I had that I requested that was moved to a different place is when Charlotte says: “This meat has been used for soup”: that just seemed to me to be such a wonderful way to kind of slam the door—and Buck: “Fine, we’ll move it, perfect.” That was the only adjustment that I asked him to make.

MC: Do you think that it is because we have two experienced artists—a librettist and a composer—who have a solid background, and a very clear idea of the structure, that these things were ingrained in you two so that they came natural, and you didn’t have to think about them?

RN: Yes. Now, I would have to say that Buck has worked so much as a producer and stage director, and that helped tremendously, and I was able to kind of feed so much off of that, and combine that with my own experience with opera...

MC: So would you say that your collaboration as been more the kind of a “Mozart–DaPonte” sort of collaboration, as opposed to one like those of Verdi with his librettists?

RN: Yes!

MC: Was there ever a moment, where there was a need for a musical idea to be the leading, the principal element? Was there any place in the opera where you had a musical idea, you thought: “This is the perfect melodic contour, and we have to bend the text to make it fit into it?”

RN: This is I think the great enjoyment of working with Buck, because we never had that problem. There were two places where obviously the music had to predominate. In Lucy’s aria and in the trio: it was because Buck was actually very good in sort of reinforcing what he was thinking about in terms of what if he was doing—what he would need from the characters and what he would need in terms of musical progression. I can think about a couple of instances. One in Lucy’s aria: there is a kind of a built in dynamic to it, where she is very hesitant, and then gets more and more confident about what she wants to do. And so Buck built that into his libretto, and was very concerned that the music supported that and so forth. I know he is basically happy with the way it did. The other instance in which he was actually very helpful, and this goes back to how the music can define the character, is in my initial draft of section towards the middle of Act I scene V, where Eleanor and Charlotte are having that little conversation on the blanket. In my initial draft of that, I was almost treating it as recitative. I played it for Buck and he said: “No, you are missing the point! This is two ladies gossiping, and that find it hilarious that George works for the railroad...” And all of a sudden, the music was there. But again, in this particular case, Buck was extraordinary helpful.

MC: How do you envision the general approach to writing opera? There are so many choices that you could have. Starting from this libretto and your background and your ideas, you can approach it with closed numbers versus recitative-like passages with a clear distinction; you can make decisions about repeating a text within a musical phrase; you can write something more like Wagner; you can choose rounded forms versus open forms. Would you say that all of that came entirely from the text? Was the text the starting point? I think that, for a composer, the first general question is “How can I make my material create its form?” We want to think that our creation develops organically and in a structure that logically, rationally is beautiful, because it’s balanced, and makes sense as something that comes out of the material. So would you say that in an opera that thing is really the text? Is the text your initial material, which tells you: “I am going to do an opera with closed numbers, scenes, or freely alternating recitatives and arias.” Or: “I am going to do A–B–A structures,” and so forth. How did all of that work in *A Room with a View*?

RN: I think a lot of it was organic, in the sense that you have the text as a starting point that defines certain things for you: it defines what the pace and the mood for a piece is. And once you make a

decision on whether it is just expository dialogue or whether it is something that can be enhanced musically... What I found is that when you start working with the material, the musical logic takes over. There were instance (a good example is that duet between Charlotte and Eleanor) where the music was dictating the repetition of lines that were not in the original libretto, but seemed necessary as a way of achieving a certain sense of musical structure. I think it is a fine balance. That is certainly true, I think, in Mr. Emerson's final aria, where things just seem right to me: there is that moment, when suddenly there is that A flat major chord, that just seemed right to me.

MC: Are there stylistic choices that are, so to speak, *a priori*? that are already there? Meaning that approaching this piece you have the topic and you know right away: I am going to certainly use the harmonic or structural or stylistic language of Puccini or Britten for this piece, because it just feels right, or because that is what I do best.

RN: That works on two different levels: the matter of musical idioms, and what seemed to me would work to give structure to the piece. They were techniques that I had worked out independently as part of my musical language, which was very heavily influenced by Stravinsky. You hear a lot of that in the carriage scenes where you see these rhythmic ostinatos and these bass lines, which are pure Stravinsky. The reason I used these is because they work. Now, what was kind of impressed on that, and one of the things that made working with this piece so nice, is the contrast between Italy in Act I and England in Act II, which immediately suggested a certain amount of kind of local color if you will, that I think was necessary to give the audience a sense of where they were and how they should be reacting to what they would see. So, sometimes it was easy, some times I had to struggle.

MC: The two settings: this has come up in both my interviews. In the first interview I had I was struggling to find words to describe how you characterize them—and the only thing that came to mind (but it's very superficial) was “warm” vs. “less warm.” Then I thought that you can see it as the different light that you see in a Mediterranean setting, that diffused light that embraces everything, versus a light that gives you more an idea of the distance of objects, a little more angular...

RN: The thing that always struck me about that very opening of Act II is to express claustrophobia: the idea I had is the blinds all closed, everything sort of dark.

MC: And then you have a little diversion with “The Bathe,” that gives you a sense that there is still some kind of playfulness even in a place like that.

RN: Yes.

MC: Let us talk now about the orchestra. As scholars, as lovers of music, as people who study scores, we very often in opera try to identify the role of the orchestra as creating a background, or as a character, as integral to the drama. So, you think of how that works in Verdi, or, you know, how several scholarly studies have talked about the orchestra as a character in Wagner. So your choices in orchestration, they seem to me one of the most amazing aspects of this opera, how the orchestration and the orchestra play a crucial role: they are in my opinion an absolutely integral part of the drama. It's not an opera where you see any sort of distinction between what is happening on stage and the participation of the orchestra.

RN: There were a couple of instances, where I am hoping that people will hear things and the orchestra will clue them into what the characters are thinking. For instance, when Lucy starts to read Miss Lavish's book, and I very deliberately quote the end of scene 5: I am hoping that people would remember that, and they'll know what she is reading and why she is reacting the way she is. And then, of course, when Cecil starts to read the book, that's all the music. The other thing which I am kind of hoping people will pick up—and I am never sure about this—is when Cecil is reading the part about the promenade: I deliberately kind of imitate Verdi in the orchestration, with the clarinet arpeggio

and the high strings—and I am hoping people will derive from that the sense that he is reading something that is really very Victorian and understand the flowery language. Another example is in the line: “It isn’t very good, harmony or something,” and then he says: “I suspected it was unscholarly. It’s so beautiful!” What I was trying to do there was somewhere between Ethelbert Nevin and Edward Elgar, something that would really communicate Victoriana, but would still leave you with the impression that it was an artifice—because I didn’t want it to seem like it was the same kind of musical fabric as the rest of the opera. And I found that a little bit of a challenge. And it was very disturbing when one of the Lucys in our university production said that was her favorite part of the opera. I didn’t know how to take that.

MC: I would like to make very briefly a summary about the stages of composition of an opera like this: the librettist proposes a topic, then the two of you get together and start meeting...

RN: We talked about characters, and when he finally came back with the short line libretto I was able to just go to work on that. We had one great advantage, that Buck at the time was doing the apprentice program at Des Moines Metro, so we were able to workshop Act I. That was tremendously helpful, because we were able to tweak things. Now what happened was, we weren’t able to workshop Act II, so we did the original production, and then the University of Nebraska one. The guy that was directing the opera theater there was a former student of Buck. There was this second production at the University of Nebraska which Buck and I went up for, and we realized, along with some heavy critical reinforcement from various people who saw the production, that Act II was way too long. So after that Nebraska performance, we did major surgery on Act II. We cut one whole scene, and trimmed a great deal out of the next one—which we decided that was unnecessarily expository, and wasn’t necessary. We cut out, I suspect, about twenty minutes from Act II, and the difference was amazing, ‘cause we kind of feel like the new production...

MC: This was how long ago?

RN: The Nebraska performance was very soon after we did the premiere, and then there was quite a bit of time, and then when Buck decided to do it again, the first thing that we did was going back and seriously looking at Act II, and that’s when we made all the decisions to make the cuts.

MC: This repeats a little bit history: Beethoven went from one version to the other of *Fidelio*. Was the first version the one that seemed to you at some point it could have been definitive? The one with the long Act II, before you had that feedback?

RN: I don’t think that either of us felt that it was definitive, and I don’t think that we were going to feel that it was definitive until we got at least another production. I think that was one of the reasons that Buck decided to do it again, because he wanted to kind of test it out... but now I am a little bit more confident in saying that we got a definitive version.

MC: You mentioned a couple of things I want to ask questions about. The first one is the opportunity to workshop Act I. Would you say without any doubt that that is the best way to have a composition process?

RN: Yes.

MC: Revisions, cutting, trimming, and eliminating one whole scene: what specific influences or feedback put your creations to the test? Who will you listen to? Is it a matter of audience?

RN: There were former teachers of mine, colleagues from University of Nebraska, who would be disposed to give me the benefit of the doubt, and the consensus was that Act II was just too long, and consequently, they couldn’t sustain their engagement in the piece. Nothing Buck felt intuitively based on his experience as an opera producer and a stage director.... I had to agree with that, and

there wasn't anything we ended up cutting that I felt like "you are taking one of my children away from me." I had no problems at all. I can't even remember those parts now. The cut scene was in the second position in Act II: it was a tennis match, basically between Freddy and George. As to the other cut, there was in the original draft a big conversation as they were walking towards the pond. And it was the one place in the music that I never liked, because I could not find any structure and so I was actually greatly relieved when it was cut.

MC: It would have happened here "Yes, I have said yes already." And then the orchestral interlude replaced the walk, right?

RN: Yes.

MC: Can we talk about using *leitmotifs* for an opera composer after Wagner?

RN: Basically, I have always been much more a fan of the Italian opera. I have generally some problems with Germanic opera, and so I deliberately kind of tried to avoid that. There were two pieces that I did in the interim. A piece that I did was with a woman of the name of Kate Pogue in Houston. She had done an adaptation of a Mark Twain short story called *The Man who corrupted Hadleyburg*, and unfortunately this has never been released. It is splashy, has a big chorus, and it needs a full orchestra. There is probably a dozen of minor roles, and pretty major roles. It's an opera. Since Kate had a strong background in musical theater, and I had always been interested in musical theater too, we went back and constructed it with specific set pieces with spoken dialogue in between, and that seemed fairly appropriate. So the problems of the musical structure were much more narrowly defined in this regard. And the next piece that I did which was very closely following this was a piece called *The Demon Lover*. The libretto was written by Sidney Berger, who was the director of the school of theater at the Moores School of Music, and this was a commission for the bicentennial of the state of Texas or something. This is all before *A Room with a View*. Again, *The Demon Lover* has a little bit of spoken dialogue, and is much more kind of a continuous piece, but still kind of structured, still in set pieces. We were trying to find a kind of a way of bringing the best of Stephen Sondheim along with the tradition of opera construct. So when comes time to do *A Room with a View*... well, for the way that Buck had structured the libretto, this obviously wasn't going to work. So it was almost a necessity that we essentially bring some of the sense of the *leitmotiv* into the play, just simply because it was a way for me to establish character musically and to provide a way of referencing emotions, relationships, and so forth.

MC: Would you say that musical references are especially needed in a piece like this where the drama is more internal and psychological?

RN: Absolutely. The more depth there is to the characters, I think, the more necessary that becomes. In *Hadleyville*, the characters are really almost cartoonish, because it's a satiric piece: they are acting out clichés. We had to probe a little more into that in *The Demon Lover*, so I was able to work out some technique. But there still wasn't the same need for that as there was in *A Room with a View*. I find that very useful compositionally as a kind of a structural device to provide unity.

MC: There's moments, like in scene 7 of Act II, where we hear the Charlotte's aria theme "I wasn't strong enough, I wasn't brave enough": a musical reference providing unity, recalling Charlotte's character, but also probably with the idea that Lucy at this point can be strong enough and brave enough, can make the right decision.

RN: She resists that at the very beginning of her dialogue, in a way that becomes the reason why Mr. Emerson's aria is there, because that's the final argument.

MC: Let us talk about stylistic influences.

RN: One of my trumpet players, who did the original version of the piece, had put in pencil in his part every piece that I was “stealing” from, and he nailed me on every one of them.

MC: Let us start with self-borrowing: how much material that was already in your mind or that comes directly from something you wrote before has ended up in *A Room with a View*?

RN: Nothing. Everything was completely fresh and new.

MC: Stravinsky: is there a specific influence coming from his operatic output?

RN: I am a great fan of *The Rake's Progress*. That was very obvious for some of the set pieces; I could see how his technique for musical structuring was working in that piece, so that ended up being something that I could derive from.

MC: The carriage scene in Act I: the cabaletta from “No Word from Tom”... or Prokofiev?

RN: The two places which I think are very unapologetically Prokofiev are the carriage scene, and the very beginning of scene 7, the other carriage scene—from *Romeo and Juliet*. I don't think that I was consciously trying to quote: the whole point was: what is the proper mood for this, and what is the musical expression that will get you there. And it was kind of a combination of both: since it was a carriage scene, I needed that ostinato, but then the angst of Lucy and then her mother losing her child is in the violin line.

MC: This place at the beginning of “The Bathe” always reminds me of the first scene of *Carmen*.

RN: That is much more in the area of the subconscious, whereas the interlude is pure Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*.

MC: I also see places that are very Puccinian.

RN: Yes, the Italian influence. Act I has places that are a little bit of Respighi and of Puccini

MC: Why this little fugato in this exchange in Santa Croce between Lucy and Emerson?

RN: This all has to do with finding musical structure—and because they were in a late-medieval/renaissance church, my thinking was a *canzona*.

MC: That is what I thought: the opening with the bassoon solo, very expressive, almost like Gregorian chant, and then the imitative style of the *canzona*.

RN: And it is a concept to provide structure to what was otherwise just expository dialogue, so it served a musical purpose.

MC: To close with references, how about Britten?

RN: I think of all the specific twentieth-century composers, he is my main model because he excelled so much at opera. There are two things that I have always admired of Britten: one is his exquisite sense of structure and the way he had been able to reinvent the fundamental contrast between recitative and aria which I think works very well in Britten and just seemed to me to be an excellent model.

MC: Is there a moment that is particularly dear to you over all the others in the opera?

RN: Mr. Emerson's aria at the end of scene 7. This was interesting, the way this developed itself. And also “The River.” Everything going on in scene 2, and Miss Lavish saying: “One doesn't come to

Italy for niceness,” and all of that... when you get into the river scene, what immediately needed to be communicated was that in this place of great light there is also darkness. I also felt like musically it needed something that was more intense, and of course what I had to work with was the murder and being able to choreograph that, and so it just kind of worked out so that the drama dictates the musical language. What I discovered without maybe even intending to, was that the river itself becomes a character in the opera.

MC: It is indeed a character of the opera and comes back at the end. So that came by along the process, and it wasn't a specific idea in the beginning?

RN: Oddly enough it wasn't. It is just something that kind of happened, and it felt so natural and logical.

MC: I want to talk now a little bit about tradition as a starting point, while at the end of this arching process you are going to propose an artistic product to an audience at a specific time. What is the cultural relevance of an opera today? How do you deal with the specific fact that opera might not be, unfortunately, a culturally relevant product in our time? Did this at any point play a role in the way you were thinking about your intended audience, maybe also your intended performers? How does this product, that is initially so ideal, become something that you can practically produce, and for what venues, in what circumstance? How can it become relevant today?

RN: I would like to start with the observation that my opera history class professor made, that in Puccini's time people went to the opera much like today they go to the movies. He made a point, which I thought was very on the mark: he asked how many students in this class knew who had composed the scores to various movies. The inference he was making was that in the nineteenth century people might not be aware of who was doing the operas outside of the major figures, but it was just popular entertainment. And, unfortunately, I think that what happened was that at some point at the turn of the century we lost that, and there are two divergent trends, which just absolutely are antagonistic. One of course was the emergence of post-tonal thinking, and particularly how it comes into play in opera. I have very strong feelings that a lot of people who are writing contemporary opera have no business doing it, because they don't understand the tradition and they are so into a post-tonal idiom, that that kind of gets in the way of creating an effective stage piece. And what happened at the same time as this was happening was the emergence of Broadway theatre, and that's where people go for their entertainment. And so, the conclusion that I drew from that was that if there is going to be a life for contemporary opera in the twentieth century, it has to somehow accommodate itself with Broadway, and get back to something that has cultural relevance to the audience—something that is enjoyable for them, rather than something that they need to go to and sort of put on the aesthetic hair shirt.

MC: It is clear that there is this gap, and we need to fill it in order to attract back audiences. Would you say that there are specific ingredients to opera?

RN: Opera more than anything has always been, and I think will always be, a lyric idiom: it needs to sing. What happens with a lot of contemporary opera is that they get into a kind of what seems to me like a neutral idiom—and then of all a sudden they realize they need something dramatic, and it is so disconcerting. I think that this is a fundamental problem that opera composers haven't still as a whole dealt with. Even Carlisle Floyd, who was my colleague for years at the Moores School of Music—what he accomplished in *Susannah* he was never quite able to repeat. Part of that was because—I have this theory—he had all of these compositional figures looking over his shoulder all the time and he felt: “I got to write academically respectable music.”

MC: In your writing of *A Room with a View*, how much did you have to consider: “I have to write something that embodies my idea of what opera should be, but also I need to write something that goes with some of the contemporary trends?”

RN: I have no interest at all in contemporary trends. My whole thinking was that I wanted to be honest with myself. I wanted this piece to be true to my ideas of what an opera should be.

MC: Does that come with some maturity and experience, or you would have done the same when you were twenty-five, and an emerging composer?

RN: I think that basically that is something that comes with maturity. *The Commission*, for example, was much more aesthetic in its kind of musical setting, and I think that even at that time I didn't feel I could be totally honest.

MC: So in writing *A Room with a View*, did you think: “I want to please somebody?” Of course, you must have thought: “I want this to be enjoyed by an audience”; but did you want to please colleagues, academics, etc.?

RN: Again, my sense of that is that I wanted the piece to be technically sound, and then I wanted people to be able to enjoy it. I felt like if I accomplished those two things, I don't care what other people think.

MC: To be more practical, were you ever in the situation where you thought: “Maybe I should not give this straight-out B flat minor or A flat major, I need to twist it a little bit?”

RN: I think I would have done that when I was younger.

MC: For example, did you feel a little naked where in the last scene of Act I, after the clarinet solo over the tremolo, everything lands on that B flat minor, which sets the mood for one of the darkest scenes in Act I?

RN: I would have to say that that has been a long process of kind of working that out to where I felt like I had the proper depth, the proper variety... I look at these as tools; so that where you need to have a certain expression you need more distance... One of the things that I have found that has been kind of a useful challenge for myself—that I have been able to do in some of my solo vocal works, and certainly in some of my instrumental works—is now and again doing something a little bit more abstract, something a little bit more on the edge, so that if I ever needed that language I would have the facility. The only way you can develop that, of course, is by doing it. This is coming very handy, because I have done some of these recent vocal solo pieces with poetry that is quite dark, and it was an idiom that came in sort of very handy. It wasn't particularly necessary in *A Room with a View*, so it's not there.

MC: Did you think of the needs or the expectations of the singers when writing the vocal lines, or what was going to be more challenging, in writing specific intervals, specific melodic contours?

RN: This dear friend of mine, this mezzo soprano, who has sung a lot of my vocal solo pieces—she just brags on me all the time because of the disjuncture and angularity of my vocal lines. So I deliberately wrote a song cycle for her and in the closing song I think the largest leap is a third! But again, the way I approach that is that you have to fundamentally respect what a singer can do and what the voice is logically capable of. At the same time there is another thing that happens: you have to work very seriously at the dramatic situation, and decide what is musically appropriate for that dramatic situation. That means that at certain times you have to force the singer to stretch a little bit, to essentially adapt themselves to techniques that they may not be totally comfortable with. But my

experience has been that once they do that and once they get a sense of what it is and why it might be dramatically necessary, they are fine with it.

MC: So for Act I there was workshop. You were probably working with students, so you wouldn't be in a situation where the "prima donna" or "diva" would say: "No, I am not going to sing that, you have to change it for me." But did you at any point have to negotiate anything? Of course, Cecil seems the hardest vocal role.

RN: Cecil was the hardest role for me to write. In the original production, I must have written every one of Cecil's lines at least five or six times, before I could find something that seemed it would capture his character and be "singable." When we were in rehearsal, I would go home and rewrite it and again go back and try it and rewrite it...

MC: Cecil is interesting because I think you did not want him to come out as comical or grotesque, but give him some human "substance." Scene 5 of Act II is a sort of extended recitative, but I think it is one of the most intense scenes from the standpoint of psychological drama.

RN: I look at that scene as kind of the real fulcrum of the opera.

MC: It feels so different from anything else, and I think it is a scene where the interpreters are called to a big contribution and involvement.

RN: There are two things working there: that is one of those places where the simple chords held by the orchestra had to have just the right amount of tension, so that you kind of feel that there is a real discomfort, and that at some level the actors are not really communicating. That was a little bit of a musical problem, and took some working out.

MC: With this, I would like to conclude our conversation by thanking you. I appreciate your time and all the valuable information I could gather through this interview. We will continue our conversation via email.

APPENDIX TWO

Musical examples, from the full score to *A Room with a View* (rev. 2004), provided by the composer Robert Nelson

Example 1 (Act I, scene 1):

Room With a View I/i

13

99 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = \text{♩}$
c.p.

Fl. *mf*

Ob. *f* I *mf* *f*

Cl. II *mf* *f*

Bn. *mf* *f* *mf*

Hn. *mf*

Hp.

L.

Ch. *mf*

Mr. B. To - mor - row we will make a change. This meat has sure - ly been used for soup! Mr. Beebe: *recit.*

Miss Hon - ey - church, —

99 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = \text{♩}$
c.p.

Vln. I *arco* *pizz.*

Vln. II *arco* Div. *pizz.*

Vla. *arco* *pizz.*

Cello *arco* *pizz.*

Bs. *arco* *mf*

Example 2 (Act II, scene 1):

Act II
Scene 1
Medieval

Andante quasi lento I Solo poco rit. 4 a tempo

Flutes I-II

Oboes I

Oboe II/
English Horn

Clarinets I-II
in B \flat

Bassoons I-II

Horns I-II

Trumpets I-II
in C

Trombones I-II

Bass Trombone

Orch Bells rubber mallets

Percussion

Harp

(Drawing room at Windy Corner. Curtains are closed against the brilliant August sun. The silhouettes of Lucy and Cecil are seen through the curtains. Freddy, Lucy's nineteen year old brother is studying an anatomy book and peering occasionally at a bone. His mother is writing a letter.) [curtain]

Andante quasi lento Div. poco rit. 4 a tempo Div. Unis.

1st Violin

2nd Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabasses

Example 3 (Act I, scene 2):

Scene 2
In Santa Croce with no Baedeker

[Curtain]
(Outside the church of Santa Croce)

I Solo

Bassoons I-II

p *mp*

Andantino
via sordino

1st Violin

2nd Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabasses

13

Bn.

Hn.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

13

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Cello

Bs.

6 9 13 17

p *mp*

Example 4 (Act I, scene 2):

Room With a View I/ii

51

Un poco mosso

89

Fl.I-II

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

Hn.

Tbn.I-II

Bs. Tbn.

93

I Solo

p

I Solo

p

I Solo

p *sordamente*

52

Room With a View I/ii

94

Fl.I-II

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

Hn.

Tbn.I-II

Bs. Tbn.

94

Example 5 (Act I, scene 5):

Room With a View I/v

153

109 Allegro

109 Solo

109 Solo

Charlotte:

E - les - nor! E - les - nor, E - les - nor! I asked Mis -

109 Allegro

Div. pizz. arco Unis. mp sim.

Div. pizz. arco Unis. mp sim.

f pizz. mp arco mf

f pizz. arco mp sim.

114

Picc./Fl. I *mf*

Fl. II

Ob.

Cl.

Ba. *mf*

Ha.

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

Hp.

Miss L. *mf*

C. *mf*

Vln. I *mf*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla.

Cello *mf*

Bs. *mf*

119

119

Miss Lavish:

What did he say? What did he say?— The rail - way! The

ter George Em - er - son What his pro - fess - ion was— And he an - swered "the rail - way!" The rail - way! The

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. It includes parts for Piccolo/Flute I, Flute II, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, Bass Trombone, Percussion, Harp, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The vocal parts for Miss Lavish and the Chorus (C.) are also included. The score is divided into two systems, with measures 114-118 and 119-123. Dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte) are indicated throughout. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves.

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The instruments and parts are as follows:

- Picc. Fl. I:** Piccolo Flute I, starting at measure 125 with a melodic line.
- Fl. II:** Flute II, mostly silent.
- Ob.:** Oboe, playing a melodic line.
- Cl.:** Clarinet, playing a melodic line with first fingerings indicated.
- Bn.:** Bassoon, playing a melodic line with first fingerings indicated.
- Hn.:** Horn, playing a melodic line.
- Tpt.:** Trumpet, mostly silent.
- Tbn. I-II:** Trombone I and II, mostly silent.
- Bs. Tbn.:** Bass Trombone, mostly silent.
- Perc.:** Percussion, mostly silent.
- Hp.:** Harp, playing a melodic line.
- L.:** Lyre, mostly silent.
- Miss L.:** Soprano voice, with lyrics: "por - ter, the im - age of a por - ter. I can't stop. I can't stop. I can't".
- C.:** Contralto voice, with lyrics: "E - les - nor! E - les - nor, be qui - et. E - les - nor, be qui - et, be qui - et, they'll hear— the Em - er - sons."
- Vln. I:** Violin I, playing a melodic line with dynamics "Unis." and "Div.".
- Vln. II:** Violin II, playing a melodic line with dynamics "Unis." and "Div.".
- Vla.:** Viola, playing a melodic line.
- Cello:** Cello, playing a melodic line.
- Bs.:** Bass, playing a melodic line.

Example 6 (Act I, scene 1):

4 Room With a View I/i

26 Moderato - con grande eleganza $\text{♩} = c. 88$ *riten.* 29 a tempo

Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Ba.
Ha.
Tpt.
Tbn. I-II
Is. Tbn.
Perc.
Hp.
Ch.

Charlotte:
The Si-gnor - a

(The dining room of the Pension Bertolini. There are two dining tables. At one sit Lucy, Charlotte, Miss lavish, and Mr. Beebe. At the other are Mr. Emerson, George, and the Miss Alans. The guests are eating dinner.)

[curtain] 26 Moderato - con grande eleganza $\text{♩} = c. 88$ *riten.* 29 a tempo

Vln I
Vln II
Via.
Cello
Bs.

30

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

30

Hr.

30

Hp.

30

L.

30

Ch.

had no busi-ness to do it. No busi-ness at all. She pro-mised us south rooms with a view.

30

Vln. I

arco

30

Vln. II

(non div.)

30

Vla.

30

Cello

(non div.)

30

Bs.

Detailed description: This page contains a musical score for the first system of 'Room With a View L1'. It features a vocal line and a full orchestral accompaniment. The vocal line, starting at measure 30, includes the lyrics: 'had no busi-ness to do it. No busi-ness at all. She pro-mised us south rooms with a view.' The instrumental parts include Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Harp, Trumpet, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and performance directions like 'arco' and '(non div.)'. The page number '5' is located in the top right corner, and the title 'Room With a View L1' is in the top center.

37 42

Fl.

Ob. *I*
p < mp

Cl.

Bn. *p < mp*

Hn.

Hp. *arpeggiande*
mp C1 G1

L. Lucy:
I had so hoped we would have rooms that looked ov - er the Ar - no.

Ch. Oh an - y nook does for

37 42

Vln. I *pizz.* *arco*

Vln. II

Vla.

Cello

Bs.

48

Fl. *p* a2

Ob. *mp*

Cl. *mp*

Bn. *mp*

Hn. *p*

Hp.

L. *p*

Ch. *(to Lucy)* No You must
me But it does seem hard that you should not have a view. You must have it. She pro-mised us

Mr. Emerson: I have a view,

48

Vln. I *mf*

Vln. II *mf* (*pizz.*)

Vla. *mf* (*pizz.*)

Cello *arco* *mf* *pizz.*

Bs. *arco* *mf* *pizz.* *arco*

Example 7 (Act I, scene 1):

accel. 203 **Allegro** *sim.*

202

Fl.

mf

Ob.

I

mf

Cl.

I

mf

Bn.

I

mf

Hn.

f

Hp.

202

1st Miss Alan:

202

You know we wor - ried.....

2nd Miss Alan:

202

...a - bout com - ing to It - a - ly.

accel. 203 **Allegro** *sim.*

202 *arco*

7ln.I

f mf

pizz.

ln.II

f pizz.

arco

mf

sim.

Vla.

f pizz.

arco

mf

Vcllo.

f pizz.

pizz.

mf

Bs.

f

Example 8 (Act II, scene 4):

Scene 4
Lying to George

Agitato

Flutes I-II

Oboes I-II

Clarinets I-II
in B \flat

Bassoons I-II

Horns I-II

Trumpets I-II
in C

Trombones I-II

Bass Trombone

Percussion
to Orchestra Bells

Harp
++,+++++

Lucy

Charlotte

(The drawing room at Windy Corner. Tea has been laid out. Charlotte is alone, pouring tea for herself.)
[curtain]

Agitato

1st Violin

2nd Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabasses

6

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Ba.

Ha. ^{a2}

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

Hp.

L. *Lucy:*
Some-thing too aw - ful has hap-pened. Do you know an-y-thing a-bout Miss Lav-ish - 's nov - el?

Ch.

(Lucy enters running.)

6

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Cello

Bs.

mf

sfz

mf

mf

mf

mf

f

f

f

10 13

Fl. *f*

Ob. *fp* *a2*

Cl. *fp*

Bn. *fp*

Hn. *mf*

Tpt. *mf*

Tbn.I-II *mf*

Bs. Tbn. *mf*

Perc.

Hp.

L.

Ch. Charlotte: There is a scene in it. The he-ro and her-o-ine make I've not read it. I did - n't ev-en know it was pub-lished.

10 13

Vin.I *pizz.* *arco* *f* *fp* *arco Div.* *Unis.*

Vin.II *f* *fp* *arco*

Vla. *f* *fp* *arco*

Cello *f* *fp* *arco*

Bs. *f* *fp*

Example 9 (Act II, scene 8):

27

Hn. *p* II I

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

Hp. *mf*

G. Is - it pos - si - ble? ... I'll put a mar - vel... to you. That your cou - sin al - ways hoped.

Poco adagio 28 32

Vln. I *p* *sim.* *poco*

Vln. II *p* *sim.* *poco*

Vla. *p* *sim.* *poco*

Cello *p* *sim.* *poco*

Bs. *p* *poco*

Example 10 (Act I, scene 6):

He gave me his room That he said had a view.

118 Poco agitato

p

p

mf *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *mf*

122

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. *a2*

Bn. *I*

Hn. *I*

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

Hp.

L.

Vln. I *Div.*

Vln. II

Vla.

Cello

Bs.

mf *f* *mf* *dim.*

mf *f* *mf*

mf *f* *mf*

mf *f* *mf*

mf *f* *mf*

f *mf* *pizz.* *mf*

But I can't see an-y-thing, an-y-thing... but two old wo-men Slink-ing off be-fore dawn.

129

Fl. *p* *mf*

Ob.

Cl. *p* a2

Bn. *p*

Hn. *mf*

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

Hp.

L.
Two old maids... With their trunks filled with books And their hearts... filled with

Vln. I *mf* *f*

Vln. II *mf* *f*

Vla. *mf* *f*

Cello *mf* *f*

Bs. *f* arco

137

Fl. I

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.

Perc.

Hp.

L.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Cello

Bs.

no - thing. No. I must tell him I don't care for his com - mon, brut - ish ways. I must

137

151

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bn.), Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone I-II (Tbn. I-II), Bass Trombone (Bs. Tbn.), Percussion (Perc.), Harp (Hp.), Voice (L.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Cello, and Bass (Bs.). The score is in 4/4 time and begins at measure 150. The vocal line (L.) has lyrics: "No! I must tell him that he has mis - es - ti - mat - ed me, That he does - n't". The score includes various dynamic markings such as *mf*, *f*, *sub. f*, *mp*, and *arco*. A rehearsal mark "151" is placed above the Violin I staff at the start of measure 151.

Example 11 (Act I, scene 6):

196

Room With a View I/vi

202

Fl. I
mf *f*

Ob. I
mf *f*

Cl.
mf *f*

Bn.
mf *f*

Hn.
202

Tpt.

Tbn. I-II

Bs. Tbn.
202

Perc.
202

Hp.
202

L.
true. It can't be true. If this is love I don't want it. If this is Hell I be - lieve it.

202

Vln. I
mf *f*

Vln. II
mf *f*

Vla.
Unis. Div. Unis.
mf *f*

Cello
mf *f*

Bs.
mf *f*

APPENDIX THREE

Plot summary of the opera *A Room with a View*

Act One: Florence, Italy, Spring of 1907

Scene One: *The Bertolini*

During dinner, Lucy Honeychurch, a young Englishwoman, and Charlotte Bartlett, her cousin and chaperone, meet the other English guests at their pension, the Bertolini. They include a lady romance novelist, Miss Lavish, and the free thinking Mr. Emerson and his taciturn son, George. Rounding out the guest list is Mr. Beebe, and elderly spinster sister, the Miss Alans. Mr. Emerson and his son offer to exchange rooms with Lucy and Charlotte so that the women can have a view. The offer is reluctantly but gratefully accepted.

Scene Two: *In Santa Croce without a Baedeker*

Out on the streets, Miss Lavish introduces the hesitant Lucy to the sights and smells of Italy. Left to wander the church of Santa Croce by herself, Lucy encounters the Emersons. Mr. Emerson encourages Lucy to try to understand and help George out of his depression. Lucy is confused.

Scene Three: *The River*

In a piazza by the river Arno, Lucy witnesses a traumatic murder and George comes to her rescue. Something has snapped in George's mind and he puzzles over its meaning. Lucy is intrigued but unsure of her feelings.

Scene Four: *Possibilities of a Pleasant Outing*

The next morning on the same piazza, Miss Lavish records the details of Lucy's previous day as background for her new novel. Lucy and Charlotte are invited for a drive in the hills the next day by Mr. Eager, the English chaplain in Florence. They accept. Charlotte delivers a letter to Lucy informing them that friends of theirs, the Vyses, are in Rome. They discuss the possibility of going to Rome instead of the drive.

Scene Five: *The Reverend Arthur Beebe, the Reverend Cuthbert Eager, Mr. Emerson, Mr. George Emerson, Miss Eleanor Lavish, Miss Charlotte Bartlett, and Miss Lucy Honeychurch Drive Out in Carriages to See a View: Italians Drive Them.*

On a carriage ride in the hills of Fiesole, Mr. Eager and Miss Lavish compete in their knowledge of Italy. Their Italian driver stops to pick up a rather amorous woman whom he claims is his sister. The disbelieving Mr. Eager huffily insists that she get out of the carriage.

Mr. Emerson protests but Mr. Eager prevails. The driver shows his displeasure by whipping the horses faster and faster.

When they arrive, the group splits up and, while Charlotte and Miss Lavish gossip, Lucy finds herself once again on her own. She inquires of the driver where the other people are, and he leads her to a field of violets where, to the dismay of Charlotte, George kisses Lucy.

Scene Six: *They Return*

In Lucy's room at the pension, later that night, Lucy and Charlotte argue about George. Lucy is in a muddle. George returns to see her, but Charlotte prevents an encounter. She tells Lucy to rest. They leave for Rome in the morning.

Act Two: Summer and fall of the same year.

In and around Windy Corner, Lucy's country home in England.

Scene One: *Medieval*

Back in England, Lucy becomes engaged to Cecil Vyse, a rather priggish man. Lucy's mother is pleased but her brother Freddy is indifferent. Mr. Beebe brings extraordinary news: the Emersons have leased a house nearby. Lucy tries to control her feelings. Cecil kisses her for the first time with less than passionate results.

Scene Two: *The Bathe*

Lucy's brother Freddy invites George Emerson and Mr. Beebe to come swimming with him in a nearby pond. While at the pond, they accidentally encounter Mrs. Honeychurch, Cecil, and Lucy, who are chagrined. It is Lucy's first sight of George since Italy and she is once again confused.

Scene Three: *The Disaster Within*

On a lazy afternoon on the garden terrace of Windy Corner, George has to come play tennis with Freddy, and Charlotte has also come for a visit. Cecil reads aloud a passage from a trashy novel he has gotten from the library. It turns out to be Lavish's novel, and its hero and heroine are suspiciously like George and Lucy. George kisses Lucy again and she runs into the house.

Scene Four: *Lying to George*

Inside, Lucy is furious with George, and with Charlotte for revealing so many intimate details to Miss Lavish. She orders George out of her life. George resists, and Charlotte privately prays for Lucy to follow her heart. Lucy insists that George leave, but she also now knows that she cannot marry Cecil either.

Scene Five: *Lying to Cecil*

That night Lucy breaks off her engagement to Cecil, who surprisingly rises to the occasion. Lucy is left alone.

Scene Six: *Lying to Mr. Beebe, Mrs. Honeychurch and Freddy*

Mr. Beebe has received a letter from the Miss Alans. They are traveling to Greece. Lucy hopes that her mother will let her go to Greece to escape her troubles. Charlotte enlists Mr. Beebe's help to encourage Lucy's mother to let her go. Mrs. Honeychurch reluctantly consents. A parlor song sets a melancholy mood.

Scene Seven: *Lying to Mr. Emerson*

In a carriage, Mrs. Honeychurch objects to Lucy's plan to run away, but Lucy is adamant. While waiting to pick up Charlotte from church, Lucy encounters Mr. Emerson in the rectory. He convinces her that her destiny is with George.

Scene Eight: *The End of the Middle Ages*

On their honeymoon in Florence, Lucy and George realize that Charlotte heloed them after all, and gaze rapturously at the view.

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EDUCATION

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Master's of Music in Instrumental Conducting, Indiana University School of Music, Bloomington, Indiana. December, 2009.

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Marcello Cormio

May 16th, 2016
