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This document addresses the settings of several letters written during wartime by American service men. The author examines how the prose affects phrase length, style of text setting, time signature and tempo markings, accompaniment, and melody. Compositions included in this study are "A Letter from Sullivan Ballou" by John Kander, *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a World War II bride* by Alan L. Smith, "Last Letter Home" by Lee Hoiby, and a new work written for the author by composer James Kevin Gray entitled, "Love, Jack."

AMERICA AT WAR: SONG COMPOSERS' SETTINGS OF LETTERS INSPIRED
BY WARTIME

by

Jennifer Wright Corbell Hough

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Committee Chair

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This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive family who has encouraged me through this degree.

To my husband, Michael, your support and unconditional love means more than I could ever describe. I love you.

To my son, Miles, you are my sunshine and I love you.

To my Mom and Dad, I am blessed that I am one of your daughters. Your support and encouragement amaze me and I love you. Mom, thank you also for your editing skills.

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by JENNIFER WRIGHT CORBELL HOUGH has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

One really lives for letters from home out here, it's hard to express, but mail gives me just that much greater desire to come back from each skirmish with the enemy.¹

In the recent past, composers have been drawn to forms of correspondence as subject matter for songs and song cycles. Composers such as Libby Larsen, Dominick Argento, and Richard Hundley have chosen to set letters to music, including Larsen's *Songs from Letters*, Argento's *Letters from Composers*, and Hundley's *Letter from Emily*. While letter writing was as common as picking up a telephone or sending an email, letter writing in the current culture is rather unconventional. Letters written during times of war hold an insight into daily life for both the soldiers and the families who were left behind. There are simple descriptions of mundane daily activities and beautifully written expressions of love, grief, loneliness, and excitement. Both the mundane and the extraordinary are present in the texts of the works discussed in this paper.

¹ Smithsonian National Postal Museum, "Missing You – Letters from Wartime," Smithsonian National Postal Museum Web site, YouTube video file, 8:32, http://npm.si.edu/exhibits/2d2_missing_you_movie.html (accessed December 16, 2013).

This document examines the settings of several typical letters: “A Letter from Sullivan Ballou” composed by John Kander, Alan L. Smith’s *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a World War II bride*, “Last Letter Home” composed by Lee Hoiby, and a new work written for the author by James Kevin Gray entitled “Love, Jack.” Each piece is based on a letter or letters written during a time of war, spanning from the Civil War to the first Iraq War. The setting of prose offers a different set of challenges than setting poetry; each song will be examined for how the prose affects phrase length, style of text setting, time signature and tempo markings, accompaniment, and melody.

Prose settings are not unusual in the overall output of American art song. For example, Dominick Argento’s contribution to the settings of prose includes *Letters from Composers*, the setting of letters written by Chopin, Mozart, and Bach amongst others, *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, which is taken from the journal of Virginia Woolf, and *Casa Guidi*, a cycle of songs taken from letters written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A challenge for composers in setting letters is the sentence structure and lack of regular rhythm in the text, which is unlike traditional poetic forms. Also, it is sometimes necessary for the sake of musical setting to delete portions of the text without losing the original intent of the letter, as is the case in the songs discussed here.

The questions to answer are: Why do these works move us? What draws us to settings like these, which examine the human condition and the raw, open

emotion that is displayed in the letters? Do they remind us of our emotions, our own humanity, or simply our own lives?

The works covered in this document are unique due to the timing of the letters in relation to the subsequent death of the soldiers. Many of the letters contain evidence that the soldiers anticipated their deaths and therefore confided in their loved ones. The contents of the letters often reflect on the lives they left behind, loved ones, and moments of their everyday lives as they currently exist. The texts evoke thoughts of the brevity of life, the sacrifice of soldiers, and the sacrifice made by their families. Clearly, each soldier is more than a faceless warrior, but is an individual uprooted from a life woven with family and friends. Why does it speak to each of us? Is it the everyman? Do we relate to the loss, to the sacrifice?

This discussion includes settings by American composers of texts written by American soldiers while they were away at war. The common link between all of these soldiers is the sacrifice of their lives to the service of their country, and a great pride in having served. The visceral honesty in the soldiers' writings inevitably evokes an emotional response and the composers have enhanced and directed that response through their settings. Often in poetry, interpretation is left to the reader, but in the case of these texts, the soldiers' intentions are abundantly clear. The letters contain proclamations of love, of regret, and statements that look toward a future together, which ultimately never came to fruition.

CHAPTER II

A LETTER FROM SULLIVAN BALLOU – JOHN KANDER

John Kander, known for musicals such as *Cabaret* and *Chicago*, composed his setting of the Sullivan Ballou letter for American soprano, Renée Fleming in 1994. Kander was born in Kansas City, Missouri on March 18, 1927, and wrote his first composition in the second grade (during math class).² Kander states that he has been pulled in two directions musically, describing himself as a “musical schizophrenic.”³ His interests reside in both classical and theatre music, which stems from his family’s tradition of listening to popular music as well as the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts each Saturday.⁴ On his compositional style, he says, “I was always attracted to the idea of words and music together telling a story. It sounds phony, but it’s true. It’s just something that I did and didn’t think about a lot.”⁵ Kander graduated from Oberlin College in 1951 and continued with graduate school at Columbia University where he studied composition with Jack Beeson and Douglas Moore. Although the majority of his compositions are within

² New Music USA, “John Kander: Passing Through Curtains,” New Music Box Web site, 9:07, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/john-kander-passing-through-curtains/> (accessed December 17, 2013).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

the musical theatre genre, he also composed chamber music, several orchestral pieces, a one-act opera, and art songs, including *A Letter From Sullivan Ballou*.⁶

Ballou, born in Smithfield, Rhode Island on March 28, 1829, was known as a “self-made” man because of the early death of his parents. He studied law and began practicing in 1853. He married Sarah Hart Shumway on October 15, 1855 and they had two children, Edgar and William.⁷ A successful lawyer and politician, Ballou served as the Speaker of the Rhode Island House of Representatives.⁸ Initially, Ballou decided not to enlist because he knew that it would be a detriment to his family;⁹ Governor William Sprague, however, offered Ballou a commission in the army in the summer of 1861, and he accepted and entered the army as a Major in the Second Regiment of Rhode Island Detached Militia.¹⁰ Ballou took care to dictate a Last Will and Testament before his departure in which he named Sarah his executor.¹¹ Away at war just over a month, Ballou was injured by cannon fire and transported to a field hospital where a portion of his damaged leg was surgically removed.¹² Because of inconsistent communication during this period of time, false reports of Ballou’s

⁶ New Music USA, “John Kander: Passing Through Curtains,” New Music Box Web site, 9:07, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/john-kander-passing-through-curtains/> (accessed December 17, 2013).

⁷ Young, Robin, *For Life & Liberty: The Untold Civil War Story of Major Sullivan Ballou and His Famous Love Letter* (New York, Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2006), xxvi.

⁸ *Ibid*, 113.

⁹ *Ibid*, 215.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 251.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 253.

¹² *Ibid*, 519.

death led to a resolution by the Woonsocket Guards on July 24, 1861, that reached Sarah.¹³ As a result of this information, Sarah began the formal period of mourning. Even after the period of mourning began, Sarah received letters Sullivan wrote prior to his injury and subsequent death.¹⁴ Ballou died on Sunday, July 28, 1861, following a brief period as a prisoner of war, due to “exhaustion following surgery”.¹⁵ The now famed letter that Sullivan wrote to Sarah was first made public in the late 1860s, and was again brought to the forefront with a documentary from Public Television in 1990.¹⁶

Kander’s setting contains excerpts from Ballou’s letter including a brief opening monologue taken from the beginning of the letter to Sarah, indicating his regiment would soon be moving to be a part of the Battle of Bull Run. Large sections of the letter have been omitted by Kander, but the essence of the text remains. The one significant sentence not set is Ballou’s initial indication that he believes his death is imminent:

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death – and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country and thee.¹⁷

¹³ Young, 617.

¹⁴ Ibid, 616.

¹⁵ Ibid, 631.

¹⁶ Ibid, xxvii-xxviii.

¹⁷ PBS, “Historical Document: Sullivan Ballou Letter,” PBS Web site, <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/primarysources/sullivan-ballou-letter.html> (accessed December 16, 2013).

A primarily middle-voice piece, *A Letter from Sullivan Ballou* is less about vocalism and more about the conveyance of a text written for one person to read - Sarah Ballou. We have the opportunity to voyeuristically experience Major Ballou's love of his God, wife, children, and country through the text of this letter.

In traditional art song, one finds that phrases are often equal in length due to the meter of the poetry; however, within the setting of prose one finds inconsistency in phrase length. Kander has preserved the original language of the letter; he employs compositional techniques to maintain the natural rhythm of the language, such as variable phrase length, a key element found in this work. Kander consistently breaks sentences into phrases by following the punctuation or syntax of the original text, breaking most frequently after a comma or period and prior to a conjunction or preposition. Throughout the piece he writes phrases between two and six measures in length, and maintains a syllabic setting of the letter, with the rhythm determined by the natural flow and emphasis of the text. In order to accommodate polysyllabic words, Kander often employs the use of triplets and sixteenth note patterns (Figure 1).

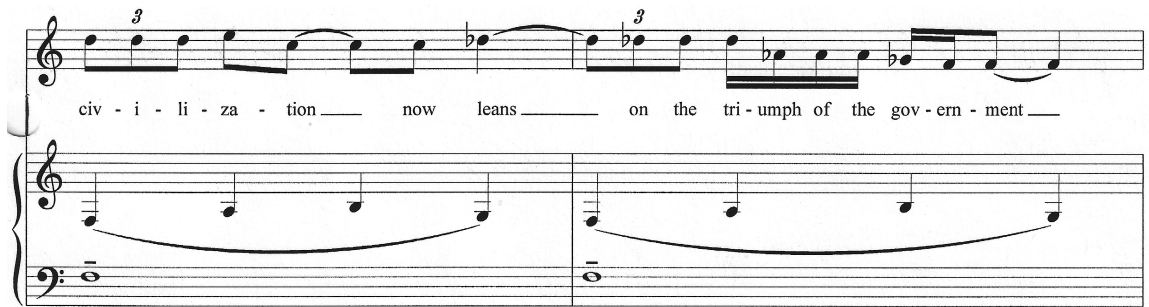


Figure 1. "A Letter from Sullivan Ballou," mm. 10-11.

A Letter From Sullivan Ballou
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Kander uses *quasi recitative* in mixed meter to maintain natural speech patterns; however, the majority of this work is written in 4/4. In the mixed meter sections, Kander gives further direction for rhythmic groupings for the sake of phrasing; for example, measure 25 is in 10/4, but he indicates that it should be grouped in one (see Figure 2). He specifies similar markings in later measures of the quasi recitative section including groupings of two or three to indicate his intent for shaping phrases.

The sparseness in Kander's accompaniment does not diminish the impact of this score. The most important element of this piece is the text, which is evident through his often-modest accompaniment; it does not, however, diminish the significance of the piano part. The accompaniment in the opening twenty-one measures reflects the consistency of Ballou's commitment to "the cause in which

[he is] engaged”¹⁸ through relentless and invariable quarter notes (see Figure 1). Kander transitions into quasi recitative during measures 25-32 where the rolled chords of the accompaniment allow for a free, *secco recitative* approach to the delivery of the text. While the recitative setting allows for a natural delivery of the text, there are potential problems for intelligibility due to the occasionally *passaggio*-centered *tessitura* for the vocalist. Also woven into this section are emotional proclamations that are centered on Ballou’s relationship with his wife (Figure 2). The ascending shape of the first melodic phrase is reminiscent of the farewell tune, “Taps;” however, the phrase ultimately completes with a descending line to mirror Ballou’s humanity and to foreshadow his untimely death.

¹⁸ John Kander, “A Letter from Sullivan Ballou,” text by Sullivan Ballou (Florida: Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., 1994), 1.

In one *quasi recitative*

Sar - ah, my love for you is death - less. It seems to

mp colla voce

bind me with might - y ca - bles that noth - ing but om - ni - po - tence could break;

Figure 2. "A Letter from Sullivan Ballou," mm. 25-27.

A Letter From Sullivan Ballou
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At the end of the quasi recitative, Kander modulates to F-major and returns the subdivision of the measure to four. The section is comprised of rolled and block chords in the left hand, similar to the previous section, while the right hand adds more harmonic texture and sweep through the inclusion of open fifths and doubling of the melody; all of which are reminiscent of early American parlor music. Ballou is resolute in his commitment to his cause and to his family and the juxtaposition of these two commitments is reflected in the piano part with the left

hand representing his commitment to his cause and the right hand reflecting his commitment to his family.

Beginning at measure 55, the piano part shifts abruptly with the words “but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed.”¹⁹ Both staves are in treble clef and have a sextuplet undulation in contrary motion, indicating an emotional shift towards the hope of one day seeing his family; however, throughout the flurry of activity in the piano part, the significant inclusion of a minor third foreshadows Ballou’s death. Kander then makes another sudden shift at measure 60 by setting the words “If I do,”²⁰ as quarter notes which briefly slows time before another change in emotion towards desire, when Ballou’s proclamation of love for Sarah is set in long sweeping lines. In this section, the compositional style is more overtly romantic with his use of octaves, open sixths, open fifths, and thirds to double the melody. The piano doubles the melody directly or echoes it, which helps to build the music emotionally, often voicing the piano above the vocalist. The left hand varies once again between rolled and block chords. Interestingly though, when the piano and voice are combined there are subtle dissonances that appear, all functioning within a I-IV-V-I chord progression. Kander changes the color of a standard chord progression by adding non-chord tones, which makes the piano part appear to be polytonal.

¹⁹ Kander, 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid, 7.

The final key change is to F major at measure 78, but the piece does not arrive at tonic until ten measures into the new key. Prior to the arrival at tonic, arpeggiation is introduced at measure 78 in the left hand of the piano part, while the doubling of the melody in the right hand indicates Ballou's musing over coming back after this death to be near Sarah as a spirit. The arpeggiation represents the musing and the hope for this to be true, while the octave doubling is reminiscent of the romantic style seen earlier in the piece. When the left hand finally reaches tonic at measure 87, the right hand contrasts by playing an A-major chord. This combination creates dissonance between the hands of the piano part, while the sustained vocal line easily soars above this dissonance on the word "always."²¹ From measures 78-91, the vocal line is primarily in the passaggio, similar to earlier sections when the ascent into the passaggio reflects heightened emotion. Yet again Kander changes the mood of the piece at measure 92 when he writes block chords in contrary motion to represent the movement of the breeze for the text "And if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by."²² These words are not filled with emotion, but are a statement of hope for Sarah.

A romantic style returns at measure 101 when Ballou again addresses Sarah and asks her not to mourn for him as if he is dead, but that he is "gone" and they will see each other again. Kander ends this piece with a seventeen-

²¹ Kander, 10

²² Ibid, 11.

measure piano postlude that begins with a transposition of the melody found in the vocal line of measure 25 (“Sarah, my love for you is deathless”).²³ This reflection on “Taps” begins as a single melodic line in the right hand and is then harmonized with sixths and thirds. Beginning at measure 116, the arpeggiation moves to the left hand with block chords in the right that have an overarching IV-I chord progression that closes the postlude with an “Amen” cadence. In some editions of the score, it is indicated that the opening monologue should be reiterated in the postlude.

²³ Kander, 3.

CHAPTER III

VIGNETTES: LETTERS FROM GEORGE TO EVELYN: FROM THE PRIVATE PAPERS OF A WORLD WAR II BRIDE – ALAN SMITH

Alan Louis Smith is the chair of keyboard studies and director of the Keyboard Collaborative Arts program at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music. He has been a member of the piano and voice faculty at the Tanglewood Music Center for more than twenty years and has collaborated with and written for some of this generation's most highly celebrated artists. Smith's music studies began at Baylor University in solo piano performance as well as a minor in voice; after taking a leave of absence in his senior year in order to tour as an arranger for a Christian singing group, he returned to finish his degree. Smith continued his education with a master's degree in piano performance at Baylor University; during this time, Smith's interest in collaborative piano began while serving as a pianist for the opera department. Smith completed his Doctorate of Musical Arts in accompanying at University of Michigan in 1986 with Martin Katz.²⁴

²⁴ Tamara Brooke Regensburger, "Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: the History, Evolution and Performance of a Modern American Song Cycle" (dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2009), 16-21.

Smith has said, “My goal is to be honest. Musically honest, textually honest, emotionally honest...”²⁵ He says, “I am a composer who believes in tonal music...And there are infinite ways of putting together twelve tones and it can be beautiful.”²⁶ Smith’s music is not, however, void of dissonance. Tamara Regensburger writes of Smith’s style,

Smith has many composers who have influenced his unique compositional voice, and they include: Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Richard Strauss, Hugo Wolf, Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy. Though these primary influences span different eras, continents and native languages, there are two common elements shared by their work that were formative for Smith. The first was their ability to set their native language in a way that made the text communicative and able to be delivered in a vocal registration that supported the clarity of the text. The second was the ability to write with the utmost aural beauty.²⁷

In addition to tonality, Smith utilizes harmonic planing,²⁸ mixed meter, a lack of key signature, and the use of a falling minor third,²⁹ while using a syllabic approach to these text settings. Smith’s setting of letters is unique to this discussion due to its song-cycle structure. Great musical variation between the songs allows for the text to be reflected in the accompaniment.³⁰ He has said about choosing texts,

²⁵ Ibid, 120.

²⁶ Regensburger, 22.

²⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁸ Harmonic planing: when the harmonic intervals are kept consistent in relationship to the melodic line. (Ellis Diss)

²⁹ Regensburger, 96.

³⁰ Ibid, 117.

I look for texts that do exactly that [have this very strong personal, human spirit connection]. I look for texts that move me emotionally, largely. As a person I am emotional first and rational second. So I choose texts which are that way too, by and large, emotional first and rational second.³¹

This study examines each of the eleven songs of this cycle, which are organized as a prologue, four movements, and an epilogue.

Prologue

Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn begins with a prologue that is a sixteen-measure setting of two words, “Dearest, Darling,” followed by vocalizations of [a] and [u]. The prologue features the setting of a falling minor third, which Smith describes as an interval that “every musical culture on the earth has... as a natural part of their harmonics...like when you say ‘yoo-hoo’.”³² In common time, the prologue is rhythmically simple with the quarter note providing the main pulse. The inner voices of the piano part are initially the center of activity. The piano part develops harmonically through harmonic planing within the block chords (mm. 9-12), which are a series of parallel fifths with the occasional perfect fourth that builds to the pinnacle of the phrase at measure 13. These dissonances in the prologue are a foreshadowing of the tragedy to come later in the cycle. At the phrasal climax, he writes a chord in one key in the left hand while the right hand is in another key. Regensberger writes, “As his writing became more sophisticated Smith devised harmonic textures around bi-tonal chording. This meant that the notes in the right hand would be in one key while

³¹ Ibid, 119.

³² Regensburger, 151.

the left hand in another, adding to the complexity of the sound.”³³ The top of the chord is a G natural that falls a minor third to an E natural in the next measure. This is then echoed by the soprano in the final phrase. Smith provides dynamic markings for each phrase, which indicates that he has very specific intentions for the interpretation of the piece. Smith marks the prologue with an interpretive indication, “From far away in time and place”, rather than a tempo marking.³⁴ The prologue ends with the vocalist singing two measures of [u] while the pianist holds a previously rolled chord; both decrescendo to the end of the Prologue. The moment of serenity breaks with the *attacca* as the first movement begins with the sudden onset of forte trills.

I. Stationed in Europe

Dec. '42 England – I had seen fire

“I had seen fire” is written with no key signature, allowing for tonal freedom; accidentals begin to appear in the fourth measure of the vocal line and the fifth measure of the piano part. Whereas the prologue is consistently in common time, this movement is written in mixed meter, alternating between 3/4, 4/4, and 5/4. Opening with trills interchanging between the left and right hands, the piano part is agitated and passionate throughout. In the syllabically set text, George is comparing a swiftly moving fire with the passion shared between he and Evelyn, and the piano reflects that desire. The tempo marking, a quarter note

³³ Ibid, 25.

³⁴ Smith, Alan Louis, *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: From the Private Papers of a World War II Bride*, text by George W. Honts, (Fayetteville, Arkansas: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2002), 1.

at approximately 160, propels both the vocal line and piano part forward. At measure 23 a series of inverted triplet arpeggios begins in a quiet undulation and builds through the text, “Our hearts were rejoined and we were in each other’s arms,” reflecting the rise in sexual desire.³⁵ Each triplet through measure 31 contains a descending minor third (Figure 3), while the remaining triplets intensify harmonically through the inclusion of a major second (Figure 4).

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.) for measures 24-26. The Soprano part is on a single staff with a treble clef. The lyrics are "Our hearts were re-". The Piano part consists of two staves, treble and bass clefs. It features inverted triplet arpeggios in both hands, with a descending minor third interval in each triplet. The piano part is marked with a '3' above each triplet.

Figure 3. “Dec. ‘42 England – I had seen fire,” mm. 24-26.
 Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a WWII bride
 Words and Music by Alan L. Smith
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³⁵ Smith, 3-4.

f I. Stationed in Europe

4

Sop.

oth - er's arms.

Pno.

f *decresc.* *rall.*

ped. *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.*

Figure 4. “Dec. ’42 England – I had seen fire,” mm. 31-34.

Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a WWII bride

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Ultimately there is release with the words, “We were pitiful in the bliss and pain of it,” at measure 36 with sustained rolled chords in the accompaniment and the final movement in the top voice of the chord descending a minor third. Smith directs the vocalist to sing this phrase “almost laughing with pleasure.”³⁶ Utilizing unaccompanied recitative, Smith maintains tonal ambiguity through the use of accidentals while the vocal line slowly rises in a joyous declaration of love (“so lavish were our loves so strong our need and right for each other ...”³⁷). At measure 48, Smith writes block, dotted-half note chords underneath “vigorous and sentient our years,” an example of harmonic planing. These chords transition to a reprise of the frenetic, descending, arpeggiated triplets and are a brief

³⁶ Smith, 4.

³⁷ Ibid, 4-5.

reminder of earlier passion. Smith repeats the same chord of release before the vocalist “lightly and playfully” asks “You will remember won’t you?”.³⁸ Smith sets this question with an appropriate ascending inflection of a minor third.

6 April '44 England – Good morning darling

The titular phrase is set as a simple *a cappella* line ending on a descending minor third depicting intimacy and familiarity (“yoo-hoo”).³⁹ The meter shifts between 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/4, 8/4, and 9/4 as needed for the variable length of phrases. “Good morning darling” features several rhythmic figures based on a triplet that are shared between the voice and piano. The piano part includes the rambling of the full triplet introducing the pastoral quality of this song; it also paints the rocking of a ship with a quarter note – eighth note triplet later in the song. The vocal line is set syllabically and often features triplet figures reflecting the movement of the grass and sheep on the downs (Figure 5).

³⁸ Smith, 5.

³⁹ Regensburger, 151.

Sop. 6
The grassy downs are sparkling like myriads of diamonds.

Pno. 6

Figure 5. “6 April ’44 England – Good morning darling,” m. 6.
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A common convention for Smith is the inclusion of an unaccompanied phrase. While these phrases are most often moments of intimacy between George and Evelyn, Smith creates an atmospheric mood by setting “and displaying their woolly youngsters with great” as an unaccompanied phrase, which through its ascent evokes pride. The setting of “pride” is a sudden shift at the downbeat of measure 12 in the piano to a B-major chord in first inversion, bolstering the feeling of pride. The vocal line describes the distant view of the sea and the anchored ships, while the triplet rhythmic figures in the piano paint the rocking of the ships. This song closes with the intimate phrase, “This morning my heart goes out to you...,” set without piano and followed by a one-measure postlude based on the triplet figure concluding with a falling minor third set in parallel fourths (Figure 6).

21 *mf* full and loving *ten.*

Sop. This mor - ning my heart goes out to you..._____

21 *pp* 3 3

Pno.

Pea *

Figure 6. "6 April '44 England – Good morning darling," mm. 21-22.
 Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a WWII bride
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Mar. 18, '45 Germany – I am still the busiest guy

An a cappella phrase reminiscent of a trumpet call opens this song followed by an eighth-note block chord marked fortissimo, accented, and harsh, evoking cannon fire. In measure 4, the speed at which time passes is painted through the contrary motion and hemiola in the piano; the melody also mirrors the hasty passage of time with a descending triplet figure for the setting of "and the days and nights run together and melt away with alarming speed,"⁴⁰ marked with an accelerando and followed by a single accented chord. This phrase marks one of only five times in the entire cycle that Smith's text setting is not strictly syllabic, reserving this for unique moments of expression including the words "days" and "melt," evoking how swiftly time moves. Harmonic planing begins in

⁴⁰ Smith, 11.

measure 6 along with a new tempo marking of “Grandly” (♩=48). Repeated eighth notes plodding along in the left hand signifying the slowing of the passage of time until George will see Evelyn again, while the melody, doubling the piano, has the text “Still, each one that passes brings closer that time when my purgatory on earth shall be ended.”⁴¹ Signifying the end of his purgatory, Smith writes a five second *caesura* followed by a lyric recitative setting of “and I can enter into my heaven through the portals of your two lovely arms.”⁴² While the composer gives clear phrasing marks, he also indicates breaths during the phrase to strengthen the emphasis of the text “and I can enter into my heaven/through the portals/of your two lovely/arms.”

March 21st, '44 - ...the build up

Written with atmospheric effect in mind, “...the build up” is designed to create anticipation for a battle to come through a repetition of the same sustained, dissonant chord cluster throughout the piece, with the instruction for the pedal to be held to the end without any change. The vocal line is a monotone G-flat4 that evokes astonishment to be sung in a hushed tone in short phrases. The vocal line is further shaped by the inclusion of staccato markings on the final three words of the phrase, “rapidly being complete.” In measures 10-11, Smith writes a brief trumpet call motif that reflects back to the opening phrase of the previous song. The motif, marked “fortissimo” and “accented and strident,” is heard within the thick harmonic texture built on perfect fifths and a minor second,

⁴¹ Smith, 12.

⁴² Ibid, 12-13.

surprising the listener during a seven-measure postlude ending *al niente* (to nothing).

II. Crossing the English Channel—Recitativo

March 10, '44 – I am the only officer

The second movement contains only one song, which narrates George's crossing of the English Channel. Identified as recitativo, "I am the only officer" is divided into three stylistic sections. The piano part depicts soldiers marching at a distance ("left-right-left") with accented, pianissimo, dissonant block chords are juxtaposed to the vocal line marked fortissimo in the setting of "I am the only officer aboard from my outfit...the boys are at a high pitch and primed for action."⁴³ With the large leaping intervals of a trumpet call, the melody maintains a wave-like rise and fall through measure 9 then reprises through a repetition of the opening block chords in measure 10. George's bravado diminishes as the intervals grow smaller reflecting Smith's instruction to sing "a little shyly." Text painting creates a mood of uneasiness, humility, and fear for his coming mission on the beach of Normandy. He achieves this by using descending minor thirds in the right hand while the left hand has dissonant parallel descending chords a major seventh lower enhancing the feeling of unrest. The third major section of this song is an eight-measure a cappella setting in which George confesses his loneliness and fear, despite his "official bravado." The non-syllabic setting at measures 25-26 mimics the description "caressing, playful, slow" when George

⁴³ Smith, 15.

writes that he is “very smug in [Evelyn’s] love.”⁴⁴ Smith closes the recitative with a return to the original marching theme in the piano as a reminder of the reality that surrounds him. At measure 30, an interjection of a single block chord taken from the opening theme in the piano (Figure 7) signifies a distant reminder of reality. A constant reminder of war, the dissonance that characterizes this song never finds relief through consonance.

⁴⁴ Smith, 17.

26 *ten. rit. long*
 Sop. ver - y smug in your love
 26 *a tempo* ♩ = ca. 100
 Pno. *colla voce pp*

29 *mf* *gently teasing* *short* *cresc.*
 Sop. Should-n't I feel more proud of at-tain-ing you than if I were the big, brave, in-vin-ci-ble
 29 Pno. *pp*

Figure 7. "March 10, '44 – I am the only officer," mm. 26-31.
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III. France, having survived the Normandy Invasion, D-Day

France July 2nd, '44 – Downpour of rain

A collection of excerpted phrases describing the scene surrounding George during the horrors of war following the Normandy invasion are evoked out of the dissonant peaceful conclusion of the previous song through a frantic cadenza, replicating the screaming whistle-like sound of a falling bomb, which opens "Downpour of rain." The piano part remains agitated with a hemiolic

rhythmic pattern of triplets in the left hand and accented sixteenth notes in the right. This rhythmic motif evokes the chaos and strain of wartime described in the text, “Downpour of rain, bombers, fighters, mud, shattered dwellings, dead livestock, uprooted trees, etcetera.”⁴⁵ The final phrase for the vocalist is a cadenza on the word ‘etcetera’ marked fortissimo, emulating the frenzy of the piano’s opening cadenza. The notation ‘wild’ indicates that the unmentioned horrors are incalculable and is accentuated by the repetition of the piano’s frantic opening cadenza (Figure 8).⁴⁶

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.) from measures 18 to 21. The Soprano part begins at measure 18 with a rest, followed by a cadenza on the word 'etcetera'. The cadenza is marked fortissimo (ff) and 'wild', and includes an acceleration (accel.) and triplet markings. The Piano part features a triplet in the left hand and a rhythmic pattern of accented sixteenth notes in the right hand.

Figure 8. “France July 2nd, ’44 – Downpour of rain,” mm. 18-21.
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⁴⁵ Smith, 18-20.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 20.

France 14 Oct. 44 – The order of the day

Newsreels were an example of a common news source prior to the genesis of television. These newsreels, characterized by light-hearted narration, put a positive spin on all parts of the war effort. “The order of the day” illustrates the animated quality of a newsreel during the first eleven measures of the song. One of the few movements with a key signature (E-flat major), Smith writes detached, block chords to imitate a brass band accompanying a newsreel as well as a musical reference to the marching cadence “hut-2-3-4,” while the vocal line maintains conversational rhythm (Figure 9).

The image shows a musical score for the song "France 14 Oct. 44 – The order of the day". The tempo is marked "Jolly, like an old newsreel" with a quarter note equal to 128. The key signature is E-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is for Soprano and Piano. The Soprano part begins with a rest for two measures, then enters with a melody starting on a whole note G4. The lyrics are "The or - der of the day is mud, mud, mud,". The Piano part consists of block chords in a steady, detached rhythm. The first two measures are marked *f* detached, and the following two measures are marked *mf*. The piano part uses a simple, rhythmic accompaniment of block chords.

Figure 9. “France 14 Oct. 44 – The order of the day,” mm. 1-4.
Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a WWII bride
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An interjection of a pianissimo, block chord at measure 9 in juxtaposition to the newsreel motif causes a halt in the action recalling the reality of war; followed by a non-tonal series of triplets that is a transposition of the “etcetera” cadenza. This

two-measure transposition alternates with the cadenza in the original key. In addition, Smith has marked the half note at 54 beats per minute, rather than the original marking of the quarter note at 144 beats per minute, slowing the passage of time.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system features a Soprano staff with a whole note rest and a Piano staff with a melodic line of eighth-note triplets and block chords. The second system features a Soprano staff with a whole note rest and a Piano staff with a more complex melodic line and block chords. Pedal markings are present in both systems.

Figure 10. “France 14 Oct. 44 – The order of the day,” mm. 12-20.
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This cadenza serves as a transition to the final section of the movement, set in 3/4 time with block, dotted half-note chords in the left hand of the piano and legato eighth-note triplets in the right to evoke a melancholy and contemplative mood for the text “The rain is continuing unabated and the channel is pounding at

its cliff confines as though it were possessed of the devil himself.”⁴⁷ The song ends with a six-measure piano postlude that is a continuation of the melancholy undulation with the addition of major and minor thirds layered above. This song demonstrates a monumental change in mood; from the light-hearted feeling evoked by the newsreel theme in E-flat major to the deep sadness and melancholy of the postlude, ending with a C minor 9 chord.

France Nov. 22 '44 – It is still inconceivable

Reminiscent of the end of “Mar. 18 '44 England – I am still the busiest guy,” the accompaniment of this song maintains its intimacy and simplicity by featuring primarily rolled or block, quiet, dissonant chords. Focusing on George’s amazement that Evelyn has chosen to share her life with him, the song is filled with wonderment and joy evoked through major-seventh chords rolled in the piano part and an accelerando on the text “that you have chosen to share your life with me....”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Smith, 23-24.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 25.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.) and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part is on a single pitch with lyrics "share your life with me... a". The Piano part features chords and a falling minor third interval. Dynamics include *f* and *mf*. A "Rec." marking is present below the piano part.

Figure 11. "France Nov. 22 '44 – It is still inconceivable," mm. 7-9.
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For this movement, Smith has again utilized a lyric recitative style to enhance the expression of the text. Evident are long phrases and minimal rhythmic activity in the piano part; once again the falling minor third is incorporated.

IV. Telegram—Schism

Unique to this cycle is the inclusion of a telegram. The natural rhythm of a telegram is broken and without inflection, made evident through the setting of "Telegram - Schism." Phrases are either one or two measures in length and are indicated to be sung without emotion. The melody is written on a single pitch for the first nine measures and then continues one half-step up, all while reading the minutia of the opening of the telegram. A measure of rest delays for a moment the tragic news Evelyn reads in the ensuing measures. At measure 24 the news of George's death is the impetus for a melodic departure when leaping intervals are introduced creating a startling contrast to the previous section. The phrase

length increases as Evelyn reads of his death while the accompaniment is tonal and warm in the mid-range of the piano (measures 30-46) followed by a return to briefer phrases as the telegram closes. This movement stands as a stark contrast to the previous movements due to the brevity of the phrases as well as the separated, staccato approach to composition that encompasses the vast majority of the piece. This compositional method is reminiscent of the rhythmic, percussive click of the telegraph; it is additionally a tragic reflection on the impersonal nature with which families were informed of the death of their loved ones.

46 Sop. *p* without emotion
A J UL-I-O THE AD-JUTANT GENER-AL

46 Pno.

51 Sop.
TWO FIVE FOUR FIVE DOT

51 Pno.

Tea *

Figure 12. "Telegram-Schism," mm. 46-53.

Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a WWII bride

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Epilogue

The epilogue of this cycle is a collection of salutations, terms of endearment, and proclamations of George's love for Evelyn found in the vast collection of letters on which these songs are based. Smith's characteristic use of a falling minor third is found throughout this movement, beginning with the first two measures of the piano part; he does, however, use a major third in alternation in several places. The vocal line in the first collection of short phrases on one note (G4) is reminiscent of the previous movement. Throughout these short phrases the piano part sustains the originally rolled chord, which is open in structure and dissonant in color. At the end of measure 6, Smith includes a breath mark with a fermata above to indicate a pause before the next section. With a few exceptions, the piano part in measures 7-16 is a repetition of measures 5-14 of the prologue, framing the cycle.

Figure 13. “Epilogue,” mm. 6-16.

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The vocal line now has longer phrases and features falling minor and major thirds in measures 7-10. Smith wrote, in effect, a seven-measure crescendo through the text “Love me, Love me, I adore you, Love me, too”⁴⁹ with the inner voices moving with parallel motion, which shifts to the right hand giving rise and fall with perfect fifths. This moment in the piano part builds intensity under the vocal line, with a gentle ascent and crescendo. In the setting of George’s goodbyes, the piano part is comprised of rolled chords that are again open but dissonant while the vocal part is set syllabically and conversationally through lyric

⁴⁹ Smith, 31.

recitative -- “My best to ev’ryone – Must run now, my sweet, Gotta run now baby.”⁵⁰ Through the goodbyes, Smith mirrors the previous crescendo with an extended decrescendo beginning in measure fifteen to the end of the piece. The final two words, “Love, George,” are set as a descending minor third, with an extended break between the two words.⁵¹ “George” is set a cappella, which in performance creates stillness and remembrance around the name of the man who wrote beautiful letters to his wife, but did not see her again. The piano responds with both hands in the treble clef with an open position dissonant chord.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 32.

⁵¹ Ibid, 32.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE, JACK – JAMES KEVIN GRAY

James Kevin Gray, a native of South Carolina and a graduate of Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina in music education, taught middle and high school choirs as well as the Winthrop University Jazz Voices. While still a student, he wrote music for the International Robert Frost Conference in 1997. In addition, his music has been performed at Piccolo Spoleto in Charleston, SC. Mr. Gray was named the director of the Charlotte Chorale in Charlotte, NC in 2013 and currently serves as the Director for Worship and Arts for St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC.⁵²

Gray chose a letter written by Lieutenant Jack Emery to his fiancée Audrey Taylor from a provided transcript of PBS's documentary *War Letters*, which is a part of the *American Experience* series, in order to compose a new song for this dissertation. He chose a portion of the letter that is a reminiscence of the time that Emery shared with his fiancée. Lieutenant Emery, who served during World War II, died in Burma before Audrey received his letter.⁵³

⁵² James Kevin Gray, "About," James Kevin Gray Composer Web site, <http://www.jameskevingraycomposer.com/#!about.ciaa> (accessed January 10, 2014).

⁵³ PBS, "American Experience: War Letters," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/warletters-transcript/> (accessed April 15, 2013).

While little information available about Lt. Emery is available, a record of his correspondence has been preserved through this setting. Gray's phrase lengths vary from two to nine measures and follow a traditional model of sentence division for the sake of the musical phrase, which is set syllabically. The longest of the phrases is to be broken with a breath with the intent that the phrase would still maintain its integrity. While he writes this piece with no time signature, his regular use of four beats per measure indicates 4/4. The chamber style instrumentation is unique among the songs presented in the discussion due to the inclusion of clarinet and cello. Gray's minimalist approach is easily described as atmospheric and colorful through his use of multiple instrumental colors and tonal choices. His use of accidentals and close harmonies creates a rich texture that is primarily heard in the piano part (Figure 13).

Figure 14. “Love, Jack,” mm. 6-10.
 Love, Jack
 Music by James Kevin Gray, text by Jack Emery.
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The clarinet provides the primary motif of three repeated eighth notes in the instrumental prelude while the piano provides harmonic texture through rolled and block chords. The cello part is much more angular in scope through arpeggiation and leaping intervals. Each of the instruments has a role in building the overall texture of this song: the clarinet is the call of birds in the background; the piano is the catalyst for harmonic progression and texture; and the cello is melodic, often echoing the clarinet. Gray chooses the use of accidentals to indicate tonality rather than indicating a key signature. The voice part moves mainly in step-wise motion, with a few leaps at the end of the piece. While Gray’s text setting is syllabic, sometimes he uses two notes through anticipation or neighboring tones to give more emphasis to specific words (Figure 15).

20

I like to sit up these bright warm nights

Figure 15. “Love, Jack,” mm. 20-21.

Love, Jack

Music by James Kevin Gray, text by Jack Emery.

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Like many of the other settings, Gray’s letter setting utilizes triplets to accommodate three-syllable patterns, such as, “miss you the”⁵⁴ and “beating as.”⁵⁵ In contrast Gray has set some three-syllable patterns with four eighth notes, creating a lilting movement, unique to this letter setting (Figure 16).

⁵⁴ Gray, 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 6.

23

sha-dows move in the... 1

Figure 16. “Love, Jack,” mm. 23-24.
 Love, Jack
 Music by James Kevin Gray, text by Jack Emery.
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Overall, the piece has a sense of melancholy that is evident through his use of minor sonorities, tone clusters, and descending step-wise, eighth-note patterns, mirrored in the vocal melody with the use of minor seconds, minor thirds, and tritone.

The vocal line enters following the nineteen-measure prelude with simple, step-wise motion with text describing the atmosphere that has been implied musically – “I like to sit up these bright warm nights and watch the white clouds and dark shadows move in the night.”⁵⁶ The piano part is a combination of block chord clusters and arpeggiation with step-wise motion creating undulation

⁵⁶ Gray, 3.

beneath the vocal line as seen in measures 23-24 (see Figure 16). Arpeggiation only appears in the piano part while accompanying the vocal line, creating a lush texture; during instrumental interludes, the piano is static playing only block chords.

Typically in the same range as the voice, the clarinet is only scored during sections where there is no voice part. Gray paints the text through the silence of the clarinet and cello during the setting of “That’s when I miss you the most darling at night when everything is so still and quiet.” Gray concludes his setting with a seven-measure postlude for clarinet, cello and piano, during which the three instruments each have a sixteenth- and eighth-note rhythmic motif beginning with the clarinet, then echoes by the cello, and finally the piano to represent the return of the sounds of nature (Figure 17).

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a melody starting at measure 47. The middle staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a piano accompaniment. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a cello part. The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody in the top staff consists of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment in the middle staff features chords and a bass line. The cello part in the bottom staff plays a simple bass line.

Figure 17. "Love, Jack," mm. 47-49.

Love, Jack

Music by James Kevin Gray, text by Jack Emery.

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The conclusion of the piece is a repetition of the three-eighth-note motif first played by the cello and repeated by the clarinet in the introductory prelude. As the hearts of the lovers are one, the piece also ends in unison.

CHAPTER V
LAST LETTER HOME – LEE HOIBY

Private First Class Jesse Givens served in the United States Army during the first Iraq War, and on May 1, 2003 drowned in the Euphrates River. He left behind a wife, Melissa, a son, Dakota, and an unborn child nicknamed Bean (Carson). He wrote this letter to his family and requested that it only be opened if he was killed. ““Please, only read it if I don’t come home,” he wrote. “Please, put it away, and hopefully you will never read it.””⁵⁷

American composer, Lee Hoiby, was an accomplished pianist and composer from a young age who began his studies at the University of Wisconsin with Gunnar Johansen, and continued at Mills College, studying with Egon Petri, Johansen’s teacher. Hoiby continued his compositional training with Gian Carlo Menotti at the Curtis Institute of Music from 1949-1952.⁵⁸ Hoiby was influenced by the tonal compositional style of Menotti; his greatest influence, however, is found in his friend, Samuel Barber. Hoiby saw Barber as his “spiritual

⁵⁷ Lee Hoiby, *Last Letter Home for Baritone and Piano*, text by Jessie Givens (New York: Schott Music Corporation, 2008).

⁵⁸ Richard Jackson and Walter G. Simmons. "Hoiby, Lee." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed November 21, 2013, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13189Lee_Hoiby, Oxford Music Online.

guide, [his] musical mentor in a way, just by osmosis.”⁵⁹ Hoiby’s compositional style was staunchly tonal throughout his career.

His music is grounded in late nineteenth century harmonic language. In his song, he places a premium on a beautiful, lyric vocal line supported by an important but not overpowering piano accompaniment. Yet it is difficult to approach his music with the same analytical tools one would use for most tonal music. Hoiby writes what he thinks “sounds” right to his ear. This is what he describes as his own musical “language”. Within this language, if the sounds he enjoys and appreciates are acceptable, then he need not justify them by further analysis.⁶⁰

While his contemporaries explored current trends in atonality and minimalism, Hoiby strictly adhered to the precepts of tonality despite not always being taken seriously.⁶¹

Carol Kimball describes Hoiby’s style as “consistently natural, expressive, accessible, and always vocally rewarding for the singer,” all of which are evident in “Last Letter Home.”⁶² Hoiby’s setting of “Last Letter Home” varies between phrases of two to four measures in length; phrases are often broken in order to highlight specific words through the use of rests. Hoiby commented,

I love words, I love language. I take special care that the words should be understood, and not only that, but the music should help them further, to elucidate the feeling, that meaning of the words, otherwise there’s no

⁵⁹ John Robin Rice, “The Songs of Lee Hoiby”, (dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1993), 11.

⁶⁰ Rice, 12.

⁶¹ Ibid, 11.

⁶² Kimball, Carol. *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, (Milwaukee, MI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2005), 304.

reason to set it to music....it should always support the words and make them mean more.⁶³

Set syllabically, the rhythm and phrasing of the text is determined by the natural cadence of the original letter, which is reordered for the sake of this setting. He often indicates inflection by placing the stressed syllable on a higher pitch, allowing the word to fall naturally.

“Last Letter Home” was commissioned by the men’s vocal ensemble, Cantus, in 2006 as a three-part (TBB) a cappella piece. Hoiby later arranged it for SATB choir with piano or string quartet. In 2008, Schott Music Corporation released Hoiby’s arrangement for baritone and piano. Unique to this discussion, it is the only piece set for a male singer, and therefore performed from the perspective of the writer. A comparison of the original TBB score to the solo for baritone reveals that Hoiby transplanted harmonic vocal lines, primarily baritone I and II, into the piano, and the melody primarily originates from the tenor part. Generally, repetitions of the text within a choral context are arranged as a duet between the piano and voice.

The piano and voice are in ensemble through imitation or rhythmic doubling throughout. In Hoiby’s songs, the melody is not often doubled in the piano; however, in this work it is a consistent theme.⁶⁴ Written without a key signature, the tonality of “Last Letter Home” is occasionally obscured through the use of accidentals which deepens texture and color, building anticipation and

⁶³ Kimball, 17.

⁶⁴ Rice, 19.

interjecting sudden change in emotion for the sake of expression. The color palette is dictated by the expressive nature of the text and mirrors its passion, regret, and joy.

While “Last Letter Home” is written in 3/4 time, Hoiby often stretches the length of measures through expression markings such as *ritardando*, *slower*, *a bit slower*, *slowing down again*, rather than using mixed-meter, allowing more time for emphasis of the text and musical expression. He gives relief to these moments of slowing through a tempo markings and others such as moving ahead and *accelerando*.

The melody in the first fourteen measures of the song is a recitative setting of the opening two sentences, sung in the baritone’s mid-range, creating a conversational tone. The lyrical piano part arpeggiates and moves step-wise through most of the piece with the occasional addition of thirds moving in parallel motion which deepens the harmonic texture (Figure 18).

Lento espressivo c. ♩ = 58

Baritone

Piano

p *always legato*

6

11

mf *p* *cresc.*

I searched all my
 life for a dream and I found it with you.
 I would like to think I made a positive difference in your lives.

Figure 18. "Last Letter Home," mm. 1-14.
 Lee Hoiby LAST LETTER HOME, Op. 71
 Text by Pfc. Jesse Givens
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The melody is often doubled rhythmically and/or melodically in either the inner or outer voices of the piano and is frequently echoed in variation. Hoiby composed much of the melody based on the rise and fall of thirds and by outlining arpeggios, while creating an overall arch in each phrase (Figure 19).

19 *a tempo*

The hap-pi-est mo-ments of my life the hap-pi-est mo-ments of my

cresc.

Figure 19. "Last Letter Home," mm. 19-22

Lee Hoiby LAST LETTER HOME, Op. 71

Text by Pfc. Jesse Givens

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Hoiby paints the text in several key places, including measures 32-33 when Jesse describes several important memories including his son's laughter and the "simple nudge of a baby unborn".⁶⁵ The piano has sudden activity in the right hand on beats two and three to represent laughter (measure 32); in measure 33, on beats two and three, Hoiby wrote staccato triplets to represent the nudging of the unborn child (Figure 20).

⁶⁵ Hoiby, 3.

Figure 20. "Last Letter Home," mm. 32, 33
 Lee Hoiby LAST LETTER HOME, Op. 71
 Text by Pfc. Jesse Givens
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Up to this point, the melody has been based primarily on the thirds, Hoiby introduces a leaping fourth surrounded by thirds in the piano at measure 35, which changes the color palette. The voice and the piano rise through the setting of "You will never know how complete - you have made - me," reflecting the passionate exclamation in Jesse's statement with both hands in the treble clef; the right hand is a flurry of activity with sixteenth notes and the left is a rising line based on thirds and fourths.⁶⁶ Rhythmic doubling is used throughout measures 39-41 to further support the text setting with the left hand returning to the bass clef.

Jesse addresses Dakota in the following recitative section, initially sparse, then followed by doubling of the voice in the piano that is an exact replication of

⁶⁶ Hoiby, 3.

the original choral parts. The piano part shifts to treble clef with the setting of “I will always be there in our park when you dream” with an active undulation of sextuplets in the right hand, while the left is set simply with half and quarter notes, enhancing the dream-like mood.⁶⁷ A simpler setting of the words, “where we can still play. I hope one day you will have a son like mine, a son like mine,” follows with the accompaniment again suggesting choral part writing.⁶⁸ As is often the case in art song, the piano part reflects the emotion expressed in the text, and that is true in measures 56 and 57. Hoiby’s setting of “I love you Toad” is an explosion of activity that begins with an arpeggiated sextuplet starting at C#2 and ultimately rises to C#6. These moments of exclamation are unique because of the arpeggiated flourishes in the piano juxtaposed with block chords that surround this phrase. Similar to the setting of “Dakota,” “Bean” is a cappella, creating a poignant moment when Jesse addresses the unborn child he will never meet.

After Jesse addresses each of his children, his thoughts turn to Melissa, his wife. The setting of Jesse’s statement of gratefulness for his wife is exuberant and declamatory with a procession-like melody based on the outline of a major chord. It concludes on the highest note of the piece with added emphasis by the doubling of the piano. Hoiby’s phrase lengths are variable throughout this section, with the first two phrases being the longest at four measures. Although rests break the second phrase (measures 73-76), the piano part follows the

⁶⁷ Hoiby, 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 4.

melody and supports the phrase through the use of sustained, block chords that rise above both the treble and bass clefs. The breaks in the phrase create space between the words he uses to describe Melissa, including “soulmate” and “wife,”⁶⁹ emphasizing her importance. Urgency begins to grow in the text when Jesse says, “There is so much more I need to say, so much more I need to share. A lifetime’s worth,”⁷⁰ and the piano part replicates this by giving more prominence to syncopation, shifting into an unmarked 6/8 meter in measures 85-88. This changing meter creates an anxiousness that is increased again at measure 89 when it changes back to 3/4 and the beat seems to quicken. The 6/8-influenced pattern happens in repetition, up one whole step (Figure 21).

⁶⁹ Hoiby, 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 6-7.

82

There is so much more I

p *mf*

84

need to say, so much more I need to share. A

cresc. *f*

Figure 21. "Last Letter Home," mm. 82-86.

Lee Hoiby LAST LETTER HOME, Op. 71

Text by Pfc. Jesse Givens

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The piano part is active with rhythmic and melodic unison as well as arpeggiated sextuplets creating passionate urgency through the text, "I married you for a million lifetimes. That's how long I will be with you. Please find it in your heart to forgive me for leaving you alone,"⁷¹ which is reminiscent of the foreboding quality of Kander's setting of "Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again...."⁷² After a contemplative rest, Jesse says, "Do me one favor. After you tuck the children in, give them hugs and kisses from me"

⁷¹ Hoiby, 7.

⁷² Kander, 11-12.

while the piano is tacet, followed by block chords.⁷³ In the final phrases, the piano part doubles the melody in the same octave. The piano then echoes the melody in slight variation followed by a repetition of the text, “Go outside and look at the stars,” where the melody begins a minor third higher. For emphasis, “and count them” is set with only blocked chords in the left hand to emphasize the text, “Don’t forget” is an a cappella setting, and “to smile” is unison with the vocal line which allows the text to be in the forefront. The favor that Jesse requests of Melissa is that she “Go outside and look at the stars, go outside and look at the stars, and count them. Don’t forget to smile.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Hoiby, 7-8.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 8.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Discerning why these songs are effective is difficult, if not impossible, but it begins with the texts, written by soldiers in anticipation of their potential deaths. Their visceral honesty is filled with love, hope, gratefulness, and regret, which speaks to each of us. Both performer and audience member alike can relate to the joy, regret, love enjoyed, and love lost in the texts, which is emphasized by the composers' use of tonal ambiguity and color. They each maintain the essence of the letters while composing pieces that are satisfying to sing through syllabic text setting with melodies that are both simple and sweeping, while rhythmic choices allow for the natural inflection of the text. Consonant and dissonant harmonic choices affect and deepen the emotional tone while creating rich harmonic texture. These composers have provided a medium through which these letters can be communicated to a larger audience, honoring the memory of soldiers who gave their lives for their country as well as preserving their letters for years to come.

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APPENDIX A

SONG TEXTS

A Letter from Sullivan Ballou

Words and Music by John Kander

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My very dear Sarah: The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days – perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall upon your eye when I am no more.

I have no misgivings about or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans on the triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the revolution. And I am willing, perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government and to pay that debt...

Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but omnipotence could break; and yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me unresistably on with all these chains to the battlefield.

The mem'ries of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together and seen our sons grown up to honorable manhood around us.

I have, I know, but a few and small claims upon divine providence, but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name. Forgive my faults and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often times been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness.

But, oh, Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest nights, always, always.

And if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again...

Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn: from the private papers of a World War II bride

Words and Music by Alan L. Smith

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Prologue

Dearest...

Darling...

I. Stationed in Europe:

Dec. '42 England

I had seen fire go through young pines in drought season. But it was no more swift than passion's blaze through us. Our hearts were rejoined and we were in each other's arms. We were pitiful in the bliss and pain of it—so lavish were our loves so strong our need and right for each other and so vigorous and sentient our years.

You will remember, won't you?

6 April '44 England

Good morning darling—

The sun has just come up. It's a beautiful morning. The grassy downs are sparkling like myriads of diamonds. Sheep are placidly grazing around my tent, satisfied with the prospect of getting both food and drink in the same mouthful and displaying their woolly youngsters with great pride.

From the top of our hill the great sea is as quiet as a lake. The anchored hulls of all the cargo ships are quietly swaying to and fro keeping rhythm with gentle swells that do not end in surf.

This morning my love goes out to you...

Mar. 18, '45 Germany [Along the Rhine, 6 days before his death, from a letter to Evelyn's mother]

I am still the busiest guy in the seven armies and the days and nights run together and melt away with alarming speed. Still each one that passes brings closer that time when my purgatory on earth shall be ended and I can enter into my heaven through the portals of your two lovely arms.

March 21st, '44 [before crossing the English Channel]

...the build up for the big push rapidly being completed.

II. Crossing the English Channel:

March 10, '44 [In mid-Channel for 3 days]

I am the only officer aboard from my outfit—the boys are at a high pitch and primed for action. I am not the big chap that you may have imagine...right now I feel very small and unfit, unequal to the job that is awaiting for me just beyond the horizon and I am guilty of hiding a great loneliness and not a little fear behind a demeanor of official bravado and I confess feeling very smug in your love. Shouldn't I feel more proud of attaining you than if I were the big, brave, invincible knight of your dreams?

III. France, having survived the Normandy Invasion, D-Day:

France July 2nd, '44

Downpour of rain—bombers—fighters—mud—shattered dwellings—
dead livestock—uprooted trees—etcetera.

France 14 Oct. 44

The order of the day is mud—mud—mud-- Thin slippery mud, thick, sticky mud,
French mud, German mud—The rain is continuing unabated and the channel is
pounding at its cliff confines as though it were possessed of the devil himself.

France Nov. 22 '44

It is still inconceivable to me that you have chosen to share your life with me...a
love which has given me new life, a new goal and a new approach to heaven.

IV. Telegram—Schism

WESTERN UNION 1945 APR 2 PM

6 24

..TA84

T.WA291 31 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC

2 753P

[MRS EVELYN E HONTS=

141 VINE ST RENO NEV=]

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT
YOUR HUSBAND 1LT HONTS GEORGE W WAS KILLED IN ACTION IN GERMANY
25 MAR 45 CONFIRMING LETTER FOLLOWS=

A J ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

25 45.

Epilogue

My heart, my mind, my soul is yours—

Love me—

Love me—I adore you—

Love me, too.

My best to everyone...

Must run now, my sweet—

Gotta run now baby

Love, George

Love, Jack

Music by James Kevin Gray, text by Jack Emery.

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I like to sit up these bright warm nights and watch the white clouds and dark shadows
move in the night. That's when I miss you the most darling at night when everything is so
still and quiet. Sometimes I pretend we are just sitting there with our arms about each
other our hearts beating as one, our hearts beating as one.

Last Letter Home

Lee Hoiby LAST LETTER HOME, Op. 71

Text by Pfc. Jesse Givens

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I searched all my life for a dream and I found it with you. I would like to think I made a positive difference in your lives. I will never be able to make up for the bad. I am so sorry.

The happiest moments of my life, the happiest moments of my life all deal with my little family. I will always have with me the small moments we all shared. The moments when you quit taking life so serious and smiled. The sound of a beautiful boy's laughter, or the simple nudge of a baby unborn.

You will never know how complete you have made me. You opened my eyes to a world I never dreamed existed.

Dakota, you are more son than I could ever ask for. You have a big beautiful heart. I will always be there in our park when you dream, so we can still play. I hope one day you will have a son like mine, a son like mine. I love you Toad. I will always be there with you. I'll be in the sun, shadows, dreams, and joys of your life.

Bean, I never got to see you, but I know in my heart you are beautiful.

I have never been so blessed as I was on the day I met Melissa Dawn Benfield. You are my angel, soulmate, wife, lover and best friend. I am so sorry. I did not want to have to write this letter. There is so much more I need to say, so much more I need to share. A lifetime's worth. I married you for a million lifetimes. That's how long I will be with you.

Please find it in your heart to forgive me for leaving you alone. Do me one favor. After you tuck the children in, give them hugs and kisses from me. Go outside and look at the stars, go outside and look at the stars, and count them. Don't forget to smile.

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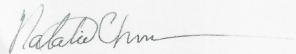
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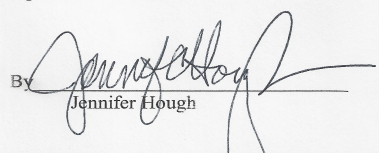
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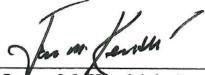
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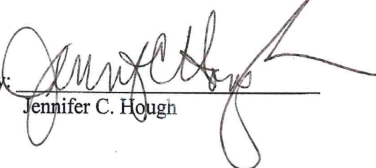
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