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## Stories Retold: Exploring Real-Life Stories through an Analysis of William Vollinger's Art Songs for Lyric Soprano and Piano

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STORIES RETOLD:  
EXPLORING REAL-LIFE STORIES THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM  
VOLLINGER'S ART SONGS FOR LYRIC SOPRANO AND PIANO

by

Katie Mersch

A DOCTORAL DOCUMENT

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The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music  
(Vocal Performance)

Under the Supervision of Professors Anthony Bushard and Kathleen Butler

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2021

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EXPLORING REAL-LIFE STORIES THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM  
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Katie Mersch, D.M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2021

Advisors: Anthony Bushard and Kathleen Butler

This document explores the art songs for lyric soprano and piano of contemporary composer William Vollinger (b. 1945). Vollinger's penchant for storytelling inspires his song compositions and the myriad of different stories he relays. In the majority of Vollinger's art songs for voice and piano, he features the real-life stories of ordinary people and interweaves moral messages. Moreover, all song texts analyzed appear in prose rather than metered poetry, follow the linear narrative structure of short stories, and originate from a variety of unconventional sources.

Freytag's Pyramid, a diagram created to analyze dramatic structures, serves as a useful model for discussing the intersection of music and texts in Vollinger's art songs based on its applicability to a variety of linear narrative forms and thematic content. By building on the familiar foundation of story narratives, such analysis can function as a relatable tool to help performers better understand Vollinger's music and illuminate the song texts so they can make informed, interpretative choices.

This document merges an interest in Vollinger as a composer and the stories he retells with a structural analysis of the song texts based on Freytag's Pyramid which informs a discussion of his musical settings. I begin with a biography of Vollinger followed by information on the general style of his art songs for voice and piano. I then outline my methodology for analysis of "Benalisa," "Alice," "Ruth," "Daddy Verne," and

the song cycle, *Acts of Kindness*. According to each song's text, I highlight salient musical features present in the melody, harmony, and accompaniment that elucidate the texts and are informed by my delineated structural divisions based on Freytag's model.

## DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my family—my parents, grandparents, and brother, Kyle—who have been my constant supporters and encouragers, but especially my dad who inspired my passion for music, teaching, and helping students reach their full potential.

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## INTRODUCTION

I discovered William Vollinger's music through The Christian Fellowship of Art Music Composers organization (CFAMC) in an attempt to find contemporary composers writing sacred art songs suitable for lyric soprano. Though not often explicitly Christian in content, the stories Vollinger tells through his music generally contain a moral message. I was also intrigued by Vollinger's settings of real-life stories about ordinary people and the unconventional sources from which he derives the stories. All song texts analyzed in this document appear in prose rather than metered poetry and draw from a variety of sources: a pamphlet from vacation bible school for the text of "Benalisa," autobiographies of Nadezhda Mandelstam and Frederick Douglass for "Second Journey" and "Freedom Begun" respectively, articles read on the internet for "Two Necklaces" and "First Sacrifice," and stories told orally by friends and colleagues for "Bridge and Roses," "First Journey," and "Second Sacrifice."

Given the idiosyncratic nature of the texts Vollinger sets, I started brainstorming ideas for how to creatively analyze Vollinger's music and noticed the parallel between the prose stories of his song texts and narrative structures. Many people acquire a foundation for narratives through exposure to stories during their formative years and learn to analyze parts of a story in elementary school. According to my experience learning how to write stories following the structure of Freytag's Pyramid, I was familiar with this model but sought to explore others as well. I considered several different ways to analyze Vollinger's texts including Aristotle's model outlined in his *Poetics*, Freytag's Pyramid explained in his *Die Technik des Dramas*, and Joseph Campbell's monomyth, also called the Hero's Journey, described in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Each of

the aforementioned models possesses the common elements of a beginning, middle, and an end, yet I found Freytag's diagram to be the most useful for analyzing the texts of Vollinger's songs because I could explore a more in-depth analysis of the longer song texts with the seven structural divisions of Freytag—exposition, exciting force, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and dénouement—compared to the three divisions of Aristotle's model—beginning, middle, and end. Additionally, Freytag relates more universally to a variety of thematic content unlike the monomyth intended to chart a protagonist's journey from the earthly realm to the supernatural and back. While Freytag's diagram helps inform the text analysis of Vollinger's songs, the model is intended for longer, more developed narrative forms so problems arise when applying it to shorter texts. Though the essence of Freytag remains present in the shorter song texts of *Acts of Kindness*, these songs do not conform neatly to his diagram, so in order to maintain analytical consistency and highlight the elements of Freytag that still exist, I implement a truncated version of Freytag's model—similar to how sonatina form is the simpler, shorter version of sonata form. As an added note, I do not claim Vollinger's songs necessitate the use of Freytag's model for analysis but rather it provides an interesting lens to view the song texts and inform the discussion of salient musical features. More on Freytag's practical application will be explained in "Chapter 3: Methodology for Analysis."

This document merges my interest in Vollinger as a composer and the stories he conveys in the following songs with a structural analysis of the song texts based on Freytag's model that contributes to my discussion of Vollinger's musical settings. In Chapter 1, I provide a biography of Vollinger and in Chapter 2, present information on

the general style of his art songs for voice and piano. Chapter 3 outlines my analytical methodology while Chapters 4-6 contain analyses of “Benalisa” (Ch. 4), “Alice,” “Ruth,” “Daddy Verne” (Ch. 5), and the song cycle, *Acts of Kindness* (Ch. 6). I also include an Appendix featuring transcripts of my interviews with Vollinger. I intend my research to provide a better understanding of Vollinger’s music, highlight the unique nature of his text sources and settings, and advocate for performance of these art songs.

## CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM VOLLINGER<sup>1</sup>

William Francis Joseph Vollinger was born on June 28, 1945 to William Arthur Vollinger and Frances Bertha Vollinger. Vollinger grew up in Paramus, New Jersey as an only child. His father worked for General Motors while his mother pursued a music career. Vollinger's parents both expressed their appreciation for the arts in their own way. His father's fascination with the simplicity of Colonial style art led to his interest in antiques and inspired the family to open an antique store. His mother's classical piano studies helped her secure a position as a church organist. She also worked as a cocktail pianist and, in the early 1930s, made appearances singing on the Bergen County radio station. Mrs. Vollinger's music career regularly exposed Vollinger to music as a young child and on their family piano, he frequently heard her playing jazz or swing music.<sup>2</sup> Vollinger's parents favored jazz while Vollinger chose classical music as his preferred style to rebel against his parents' taste in music.<sup>3</sup>

Vollinger's formal music training began with piano lessons at age nine as a result of his maternal grandmother's generosity. Though his grandmother did not have an abundance of money, she invested in her only grandchild's musical training by gifting the family a piano bought with an inheritance. The week of Vollinger's first piano lesson, he and his mother visited his grandmother in the hospital. When his grandmother learned he would start piano lessons that week, she said to her grandson, "I'll be watching you from heaven."<sup>4</sup> The next day, she passed away. Vollinger attributes his grandmother's

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of Vollinger's biography, see "Appendix A: Transcriptions of Interviews."

<sup>2</sup> William Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> William Vollinger, personal email correspondence, January 31, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.



thoughtful contribution to his early music education as inspiration for his musical aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

Vollinger realized his passion for composition because it provided a creative outlet for his interest in piano improvisation. He continued private piano lessons through high school and for two years during his undergraduate studies.<sup>6</sup> Vollinger regrets not taking music lessons on another instrument which may have afforded him the opportunity to play in the school band; however, retrospectively, he believes he made a wise decision because he much preferred improvising on the piano to actually practicing for his lessons.<sup>7</sup> Vollinger wrote his first composition called “For God and Freedom” in eighth grade with his mother’s help. He garnered local recognition for his new work through a published newspaper article written after he premiered the song at his church. Throughout high school, as more compositions ensued and music became his main focus, he decided to pursue a college degree in composition.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from Vollinger’s grandmother, he gained musical inspiration in many other ways. In 1952, he gained regular exposure to sacred music when he started attending a small church in Paramus with his neighbor/friend Johnny and Johnny’s mother. Through Vollinger’s involvement in church activities, he developed a close relationship with the pastor, “He was like my hero growing up. He was a Godly influence and a male role model, which I really needed.”<sup>9</sup> This relationship in particular contributed to his spiritual development and as his faith matured, he reflected more intently on the texts sung in service. He specifically remembers hearing Sir John Stainer’s chorus, “God So Loved the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Vollinger, email message, January 31, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Vollinger, email message, January 31, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

World” from *The Crucifixion*, and recalls how the text’s profound spiritual depth paired with its musical beauty affected him. Vollinger noted, “At a young age, I liked music that made me feel closer to God or there was something spiritual about it, but particularly God.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, during his early years and after returning to his faith, he aspired to compose with a moral or spiritual agenda in mind so others could witness a similar nearness to God through his music.

At age eighteen during the summer before starting college, Vollinger’s spiritual life drastically turned when he began questioning his faith. He describes this time as a “reverse born again” experience and one that had a major influence on his compositions throughout college.

When I was 18, I was sitting at the piano in our basement and I was going to be starting Manhattan School of Music very shortly thereafter. It might have been August. I had just graduated from high school. And I thought to myself, “What would it be like if I didn’t believe in God and I didn’t think there was a heaven? What would that be like?” When I thought that, I had this thought, “I don’t know if there’s a God. I don’t know there’s a heaven.” It was a horrible, horrible feeling. It would be the opposite of a born again experience, which I had when I was 29. It was like the reverse, and it really was upsetting. And for 11 years, I kept looking for proof that heaven, God, spiritual things [existed]. I read up on parapsychology and some kind of mediums and things...I was looking for God.<sup>11</sup>

Transparently he confesses how his egotistical and prideful nature compensated for an underlying emotion of fear. He feared failing to establish his own identity as a unique artist. Referencing his college years, he claims, “I was not satisfied with the music I was composing for a couple years at all...[I] felt like I didn’t have a voice. I didn’t know what I wanted to write.”<sup>12</sup> Rather than immediately turning back to the church where he initially found purpose in music, Vollinger started reading and writing a considerable

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> William Vollinger, telephone interview, April 22, 2016.

amount of poetry to expand his knowledge and explore avenues of inspiration for new compositions. He even attempted writing his own texts for his music but “it was only after becoming a Christian that [he] had something to write about.”<sup>13</sup> When Vollinger returned to his faith, he re-discovered the purpose for his music and sought creative ways to inspire audiences. His compositions based on true stories about real people stemmed from this objective.

For his collegiate music education, Vollinger attended Manhattan School of Music where he earned a BM in composition, MM in music education, and MM in composition.<sup>14</sup> While there, he studied composition with Nicolas Flagello, Ludmila Ulehla, David Diamond, and Mario Davidovsky. Vollinger learned orchestration from Nicolas Flagello as an undergraduate student and describes Flagello as an innately talented musician whose musical style most closely resembles Late-Romanticism. Vollinger speaks fondly of his form and analysis teacher, Ludmila Ulehla, with whom he studied as an undergraduate and graduate student. He enjoyed her instruction because she possessed both knowledge as a composer and excellent teaching skills.<sup>15</sup> In 1965, David Diamond joined the faculty of Manhattan School of Music as Vollinger entered his junior year.<sup>16</sup> Diamond’s arrival came at an optimal time because by the junior year, composition students had the privilege of studying with the “big shot” composer.<sup>17</sup> Vollinger’s familiarity with Diamond’s music and respect for his work garnered much

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Vollinger, email message, January 31, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> “David Diamond,” The Estate of David L. Diamond, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://www.daviddiamond.org/life1.html>.

Diamond gained recognition primarily through his orchestral and chamber music but also wrote prolifically for the voice through art songs and choral works.

Victoria J. Kimberling, *David Diamond: A Bio-Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), 57.

<sup>17</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

excitement about the prospect of learning from this renowned composer. Of the composers with whom Vollinger studied, Diamond's art songs seem to exert the greatest influence on Vollinger's vocal music based on the similarities of their vocal melodies and approach to text settings. Both composers' music contain disjunct, angular vocal phrases created by wide intervallic leaps, primarily syllabic text settings, sections of unaccompanied voice, and spoken text with rhythms notated.<sup>18</sup> When Diamond resigned after two years, the school hired Mario Davidovsky, predominantly an electro-acoustic music composer, to fill the vacancy.<sup>19</sup> Studying under Davidovsky afforded Vollinger the opportunity for exposure to a composition professor with a different stylistic preference than his own.

After Vollinger graduated from Manhattan School of Music, he began his public school teaching career. Vollinger's experiences with children as a public school teacher influenced his creativity and personality. He claims, "It made me understand people better, and my music is about people."<sup>20</sup> Vollinger describes himself as being extremely introverted, but in order to engage with children in teaching, he became more extroverted. He taught elementary and middle school choir and general music in the New York City and New Jersey public schools from 1968 to 2006; however, the majority of his time (1979-2006) he spent at Pocantico Hills School in Westchester, NY. In 2003, he started teaching composition as an adjunct faculty member at Nyack College. When he retired in 2006 from working full-time in the public schools, he supplemented composition

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Allen Wells, "David Diamond as Song Composer: A Survey of Selected Vocal Works of David Diamond with a Theoretical and Stylistic Analysis of Six Early Songs, The Midnight Meditation, and Hebrew Melodies" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2006), 15-30, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>.

<sup>19</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Beegle, "Considering the Source: A Conversation with William Vollinger," *Fanfare: The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 35, no. 3 (January/February 2012): 249, *Academic Search Premier*, accessed April 4, 2016.

instruction at Nyack with teaching a world music course titled, Music of Diverse Cultures.<sup>21</sup> He taught at Nyack College until the fall semester of 2019 when the school's Rockland County campus ceased offering music courses in preparation for its closure the following year.<sup>22</sup>

A singer himself, Vollinger enjoys composing for the voice. The majority of his compositions include songs for solo voice and piano, unaccompanied voice, voice and small ensemble, narrator with small ensemble, or choral works. In 2006, Vollinger earned recognition for two compositions featuring voice and piano. He placed as a finalist in both the NATS Song Cycle Competition for *Acts of Kindness* for high voice and piano and in the Susan Galloway Sacred Song Competition for *Inner Voices* for low voice and piano. His unaccompanied voice composition, *Songs of the 3 Miriams* for high soprano, secured him a finalist position in the Sacred Voice 2007 Competition.<sup>23</sup> In 2020, he won The American Prize in Composition – Vocal Chamber Music Professional Division with “The Child in the Hole” for soprano and clarinet while placing as a finalist in the same competition for his choral work “We Are Not Robins” under the Shorter Choral Works Professional Division.<sup>24</sup> In addition to vocal compositions, Vollinger writes for a variety of instruments and ensemble combinations. In 2005, he won the Friends and Enemies of New Music Competition with “The Violinist in the Mall” for violin and piano and in 2020, the same composition earned him a finalist spot in The American Prize in

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<sup>21</sup> William Vollinger, personal email correspondence, January 10, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> William Vollinger, personal email correspondence, January 19, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> William Vollinger, “List of Selected Compositions,” accessed September 24, 2015, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/List\\_of\\_Works.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/List_of_Works.html).

<sup>24</sup> David Katz, “Winners: Composers (Vocal Chamber Music), 2019-20,” *The American Prize*, posted May 6, 2020, <https://theamericanprize.blogspot.com/2020/05/winners-composers-vocal-chamber-music.html>; David Katz, “Finalists: Composers (Choral Music), 2019-20,” *The American Prize*, posted March 24, 2020, <https://theamericanprize.blogspot.com/2020/03/finalists-composers-choral-music-2019-20.html>.

Composition – Instrumental Chamber Music Professional Division.<sup>25</sup> Vollinger's woodwind quintet titled "Winds Would" won the 2007 Quintet Attacca Call for Scores.<sup>26</sup> Most recently he completed *Four at the Shore*, a song cycle for unaccompanied soprano voice and *What Lily Sang (6 Songs by a Toddler)* for soprano and C instrument.<sup>27</sup>

Vollinger and his wife Chalagne, married April 5, 1970, now live in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey. They have two daughters, Mary and Sara, and four grandchildren, Jacob, Arianna, Lily, and Elijah. In addition to remaining active as a composer, Vollinger serves as the music director and organist at Church of the Savior Lutheran in Paramus.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Vollinger, "List of Selected Compositions;" David Katz, "Finalists: Composers (Instrumental Chamber Music – All Divisions), 2019-20," *The American Prize*, posted April 2, 2020, <https://theamericanprize.blogspot.com/2020/04/finalist-composers-instrumental-chamber.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Vollinger, "List of Selected Compositions."

<sup>27</sup> William Vollinger, personal email correspondence, February 3, 2017; William Vollinger, personal email correspondence, August 30, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Vollinger, email message, January 10, 2017; William Vollinger, "The Music of William Vollinger," accessed September 24, 2015, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/The\\_Music\\_of\\_William\\_Vollinger.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/The_Music_of_William_Vollinger.html).

## CHAPTER 2

## GENERAL STYLE OF VOLLINGER'S ART SONGS FOR VOICE AND PIANO

Vollinger relishes opportunities for storytelling and frequently uses composition as an avenue to relay people's stories. Influenced by 17th century Dutch painter Rembrandt's portrayal of ordinary people, the majority of Vollinger's art songs for voice and piano contain texts based on true stories featuring ordinary people. Vollinger did not always admire Rembrandt's work until reading art historian Kenneth Clark's opinion on the artist's ability to draw "ordinary people, giving them an extraordinary inner beauty," as paraphrased by Vollinger.<sup>29</sup> Vollinger specifically comments on the transparency of the Samaritan woman's expression in Rembrandt's etching of Jesus with the woman at the well.<sup>30</sup> Like Rembrandt, Vollinger highlights ordinary life in his compositions through his choice of song texts that tell people's stories and reveal inner beauty by showcasing their selfless qualities.

Vollinger writes many of the texts for his vocal compositions. He enjoys the process and challenge of fusing his own lyrics with his music. His exploration with writing poetry in college inspired him to start composing his own song texts. He acquires ideas for his texts from a variety of sources such as pamphlets, non-fiction books, non-poetic Biblical passages, articles read on the internet, and stories told orally by friends and colleagues so the stories that inspire his texts usually do not exist in metered poetry.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Beegle, "Considering the Source," 249; Sharon Kilarski, "Composer William Vollinger: The Classics Keep Artists Humble," *The Epoch Times*, July 12, 2016, accessed August 15, 2016, [https://www.theepochtimes.com/composer-william-vollinger-the-classics-keep-artists-humble\\_2103310.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/composer-william-vollinger-the-classics-keep-artists-humble_2103310.html).

<sup>30</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, April 22, 2016; Rembrandt van Rijn, *Christ and the Woman of Samaria: An Arched Print*, 1658, etching and drypoint, some plate tone, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/392065>.

<sup>31</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, April 22, 2016.

Although Vollinger primarily authors his own texts, he has also set the words of Jenny Joseph in *Four Poems by Jenny Joseph*, Richard Leach in *Inner Voices*, Gerald Rich in *Echoes from War*, Liana Valente in *Let's Talk*, and Linda Ferreira in “Alice,” “Ruth,” and “Daddy Verne.” Notably Vollinger values his collaboration with Ferreira because he claims her familiarity with his music helped her understand his compositional approach, so her texts lend themselves to his musical style.<sup>32</sup> In an email correspondence with Ferreira, she expressed her favor toward Vollinger’s music and appreciation of their collaborative relationship:

Bill and I became friends during the Gregg Smith summers in Saranac Lake. We would tell stories and I would perform anything he brought to the [Adirondack Festival of American Music]. During our conversations, I had told him about [Aunt Alice, Ruth, and Daddy Verne] and he encouraged me to write them as song texts. Somehow he caught the spirit of these people and I loved the results...Working with Bill was always wonderful. I always wanted to do my best and then some because he was so appreciative and grateful to be hearing his music. We worked hard to get just what he wanted and gave ourselves time to come up with a product that we all liked. Bill’s music just makes sense to me...I love the interplay of the voice with piano...and I love the solo voice things – they are genius. There is drama and sweetness and conversation and surprise.<sup>33</sup>

As a young composition student, Vollinger yearned to try new ideas to discover his individual style. While in college at Manhattan School of Music, he created a composition project, titled *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs*, with the intention of exploring and developing his abilities as a composer. He also used the project to experiment with writing and setting his own poetry for a few songs.<sup>34</sup> One technique he explored dealt with his approach to setting text by alternating speaking and singing. He incorporated spoken words without notated rhythms amidst sung text, similar to interspersed dialogue

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<sup>32</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Linda Ferreira, personal email correspondence, August 19, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, April 22, 2016.



found in musical theatre numbers like “I Hope I Get It” from *A Chorus Line*.<sup>35</sup> In Vollinger’s music, the spoken sections range from fragments of sentences to full sentences or individual words interspersed with sung text. Songs composed after *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs* introduce two other devices related to text setting: 1) sung text with pitches indicated but without specified rhythms, comparable to chant and 2) spoken text written rhythmically like the “Rock Island” lyrics in *The Music Man*. When Vollinger employs these devices in his art songs, they serve to distinctively highlight a change in character voices like in “Benalisa” and “Ruth,” illuminate the text by contrasting material surrounding these techniques shown in “First Sacrifice,” and/or allow the audience to hear inflection in the spoken words according to the singer’s interpretation.

Before beginning a composition, Vollinger likes to have a guideline in mind to help focus his compositional process.<sup>36</sup> The guideline often directly relates to his intended portrayal of the character in the text’s story. For example, the parameter he establishes may pertain to an overall affect like scarcity in “Benalisa”—achieved through musical sparseness—reflecting the title character’s impoverished life, or eccentricity in “Alice”—realized musically with a disjunct, fragmented vocal melody and frequent texture and registration changes in the accompaniment—portraying Aunt Alice’s peculiar personality. With *Inner Voices*, Vollinger imparts renewed importance on three lesser-known Biblical characters: Peter’s mother-in-law, the paralytic man lowered through the roof, the donkey who carried Jesus into Jerusalem. In each of these songs, Vollinger

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<sup>35</sup> Marvin Hamlisch, “I Hope I Get It,” with A Chorus Line Ensemble from *A Chorus Line (Original 1975 Broadway Cast)*, YouTube, posted September 30, 2012, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jqGbRp2mzo>.

<sup>36</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

assigns the alto line of the four-part chorale accompaniment as the vocal melody thereby giving greater importance to a customarily supportive part.

Specific to Vollinger's approach to vocal melodies, he regularly composes short melodic fragments driven by his interpretation of how the characters relay their thoughts. For instance, how children might deliver their stories as fragmented statements modeled in "Two Necklaces," or how people's emotions can interrupt their ability to speak fluently shown through Verne's grief after losing his wife in "Daddy Verne" and Mr. Auld's angry outbursts toward his wife in "Freedom Begun." Remarking on the fragmentation of his music, Vollinger writes, "I am interested when I hear people whistling while waiting for buses, or when I hear children singing 'No more teachers' unaccompanied and fragmented. If my music is fragmented, it is because that is what I am given every day."<sup>37</sup> He claims to model his melodies after the speech patterns he hears in everyday life, musically represented through brief melodic phrases frequently disjunct with motivic repetition. Despite the fragmentation of his vocal melodies, he achieves a sense of cohesion through the story's plot and by using the accompaniment to perpetuate forward momentum with the piano continuing to play between text declamations.

In the vocal melodies of Vollinger's art songs, he typically prioritizes setting the melody in a way that contributes to a specific affect relating to the story's text while underlining particular words or phrases using range, melodic contour, dynamics, and articulation. Some examples include disjunct phrases with wide intervallic vocal leaps in "Alice," phrases with ascending melodic contour and crescendoing dynamics written to generate intensity in "Freedom Begun," and sections of songs with a consistently high

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<sup>37</sup> William Vollinger, preface to *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs*, unpublished score, 1966.

tessitura witnessed in “First Sacrifice.” Certain melodic features like ranges spanning nearly two octaves, phrases with high tessituras, disjunct phrases with wide intervallic leaps, and high pitches on soft dynamics increase the vocal demands. Despite these technical challenges the singer must overcome to effectively communicate the text, Vollinger’s songs maintain accessibility through mostly diatonic melodies, chromatically altered pitches functioning according to the underlying harmony, and vocal phrases with repeated melodic motives.

Vollinger predominantly composes tonal harmonies occasionally marked by abrupt and unconventional tonal shifts. His chord progressions generally follow the tonic-predominant-dominant-tonic structure and phrases often conclude on authentic or half cadences. At times, he obscures modal identity by omitting the chordal third or implements bimodality. Other stylistic features include the intermittent application of secondary chords, polychords, and high tertian sonorities like ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords.

The piano accompaniment in Vollinger’s art songs often serve an integral role by helping depict the characters and tone of the text. For example, in “Alice,” Vollinger portrays the eccentric aunt through wild, disjunct phrases and a dense texture that incorporates the full range of the piano. When the text mentions Alice’s parakeets, he assigns specific melodic motives evocative of bird sounds. In “First Journey” from *Acts of Kindness*, the stormy and driving rhythms of the accompaniment highlight the power and dominance of the Third Reich referenced in the text. Vollinger varies the accompaniment texture, registration, and figuration according to the song texts based on how he chooses to underline the text in the piano. Raymond Beegle, accompanist,

classical music critic, and music journal editor, provides an insightful summary of Vollinger's music while illuminating how Vollinger captures the characters in his stories.

Beegle writes:

I have known his work for years and believe, after much consideration, that there is genius in it. With astonishing depth and clarity, Vollinger brings his subjects to life. One finds a new musical language, not born out of a desire to be new, but a desire to be clear and to tell the truth. With all its freshness, it is rooted in our past traditions, felicitously circumventing all the chaos, all the attitudinizing, and intellectualizing, and publicizing, that litter the present musical horizon.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Raymond Beegle, review of "Sound Portraits," *Fanfare: The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 27, no. 2 (November/December 2003); quoted in liner notes to *An American Journey*, with Avguste Antonov, piano, recorded Nov. 3, 2013, Hartshorn Classical, 2013, compact disc.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYSIS

Through a study of Vollinger's art song music for lyric soprano and piano, this document explores a deeper level of understanding the songs' textual and musical components so singers can make educated, interpretive decisions during performance. Since the prose stories Vollinger sets in the researched songs align with narrative storytelling, using a narrative model to provide structure for analysis of the song texts serves as a way to inform the music discussion. Related to Vollinger's penchant for narrative texts, in "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," Roland Barthes advocates the universality of narratives to all humankind:

There are countless forms of narrative in the world...Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings... , stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.<sup>39</sup>

As a relatable model, narrative form analysis can function as a tool to help performers better understand Vollinger's music and illuminate the song texts so they can make informed, interpretative choices by building on the familiar foundation of story narratives.

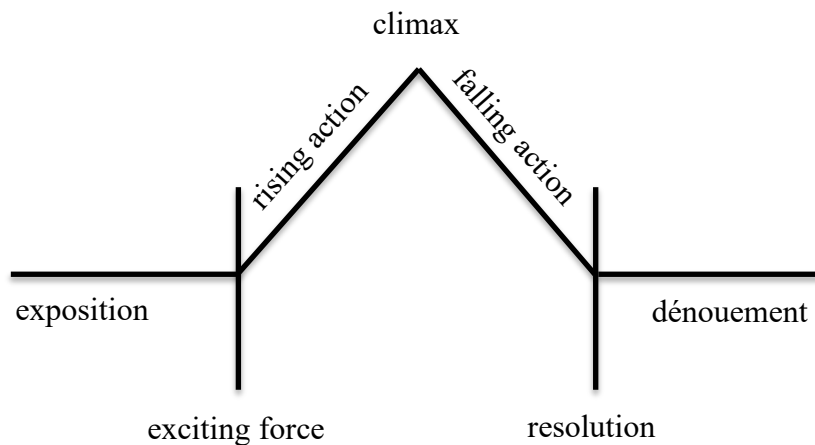
Freytag's Pyramid offers one model for analyzing the texts of Vollinger's art songs based on its applicability to a variety of linear narrative forms, including

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<sup>39</sup> Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," trans. Lionel Duisit, *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 237, *JSTOR*, accessed February 13, 2021.

Vollinger's texts most closely associated with short stories. In Harmon and Holman's *A Handbook to Literature* under the definition of dramatic structure, the authors reference Freytag's Pyramid and note the universality of applying the fundamental elements of drama present in his diagram to a variety of genres of plays, novels, and short stories.<sup>40</sup> Gustav Freytag, a nineteenth century German novelist, playwright, scholar, and critic, created his diagram in 1863 to analyze the structure of dramas based on commonly observed patterns.<sup>41</sup> A visual rendition of his diagram follows:

**Figure 3.1. Freytag's Pyramid.**



In the exposition, the author sets the scene by introducing characters and establishing the background. The exciting force is an event that occurs to launch the story into action. The rising action, initiated by the exciting force, builds the excitement of the story to the climax, while the falling action is an event or series of events that result from the climax. The resolution reveals the solution to the primary problem or conflict. In the

<sup>40</sup> William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 167-168.

<sup>41</sup> Gustav Freytag, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, trans. Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1895), vii-viii, 114-140.

dénouement, the author concludes the story by clarifying any lingering questions not addressed in the resolution and sometimes presents the narrative's chief theme or moral.<sup>42</sup>

Freytag specifically created his diagram to chart recurrent elements in five-act tragedies, thus the reason he assigned the term catastrophe as the final stage of the pyramid.<sup>43</sup> Harmon and Holman note how over time the generic term dénouement replaced the term catastrophe in Freytag's structure to broaden the application of his method to non-tragic works.<sup>44</sup> This analysis adopts the term dénouement to suit the non-tragic texts Vollinger sets. Additionally, the difference between resolution and dénouement requires clarification. Freytag did not use the term "resolution" as a separate component from catastrophe but, when applied to works without tragic endings, the resolution occurs at the moment the solution to the primary problem is disclosed while the dénouement ties up any loose ends or reveals the story's moral following the resolution.

The following analysis of the prose in Vollinger's art songs will draw correlations between the song texts and Freytag's Pyramid, which then influences the discussion highlighting salient features in the melody, harmony, and accompaniment that illuminate the texts. The delineated structural divisions based on Freytag's model account for one interpretation but in no way is this analysis definitive. While elements of Freytag exist in every song, the model does not always seamlessly apply, so the implementation of a truncated version of Freytag's model for the much shorter texts in *Acts of Kindness* allows for analytical consistency. To illustrate this, a parallel can be drawn between how the abridged form of Freytag relates to and derives from Freytag's complete diagram and

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<sup>42</sup> Harmon and Holman, 99, 146, 168, 202, 204, 208, 448.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 168; Freytag, 114-115.

<sup>44</sup> Harmon and Holman, 81, 168.

how sonatina form can be thought of as a condensed version of sonata form. Comparable to how sonatina form generally lacks the development section of sonata form, in *Acts of Kindness*, Vollinger spends the most time on the exposition in these shorter song texts, removes the exciting force/rising action (arguably associated with the development section of sonata form), and moves directly into the climax and/or resolution. Similarly, considering the shorter individual song texts in *Acts of Kindness* with an abbreviated version of Freytag's Pyramid is appropriate, whereas the longer song texts in Chapters 4-5 that contain more "developmental material" in the exciting force/rising action better accommodate text analysis that incorporates each of Freytag's structural distinctions.



## CHAPTER 4

## “BENALISA”

Composed in 1992, Vollinger drew the text for “Benalisa” from a pamphlet informing vacation bible school children of a mission project through Lutheran Church Missouri Synod World Relief.<sup>45</sup> The text tells a story about a young, orphaned girl named Benalisa who lives in the streets of the Philippine capital, Manila. Señora Selina daily visits the street children providing food while teaching them about Jesus. She seems to take a special interest in Benalisa and one day brings news about a family who wishes to adopt the little orphan girl. Benalisa’s heartwarming story follows in the song’s text:

[Exposition] Benalisa is tired and hungry. She can always find a rock for a pillow, but she can’t always find food. She lives in the streets of Manila. Benalisa cannot remember her parents. [Exciting Force] When her grandmother died, she had no place to go.

[Rising Action] One day Señora Selina came to the neighborhood. She brought some lunch for Benalisa and other street children. Señora Selina came every day. She brought food and told stories about Jesus. She said that Jesus loves Benalisa and all the children in the world. Those stories make Benalisa feel warm inside, just like when her grandmother would hold her on her lap.

[Climax] One day Señora Selina said, “Benalisa, I want you to meet some people. They want you to be part of their family and give you a home.” Benalisa could hardly believe it. A home at last!

[Dénouement] Benalisa and her friends need homes. They also need to hear more about Jesus and their home in heaven.<sup>46</sup>

Applying Freytag’s Pyramid, the story’s exposition introduces Benalisa and reveals details about her life on the streets. The exciting force occurs when her grandmother dies leaving Benalisa deprived of a caretaker and inciting the need for another provider. In the rising action, the story proceeds to tell of Señora Selina who

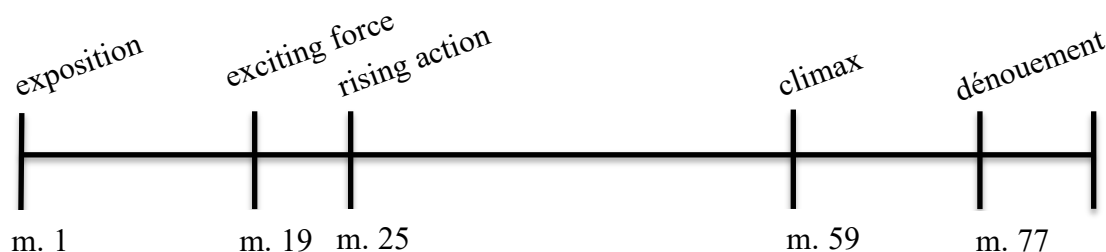
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<sup>45</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> “Benalisa in the Philippines,” *Good News for the World: Lutheran Church Missouri Synod World Relief/Mission Education Program* 5, no. 2 (1992).

daily cares for the physical needs of the street children and shares stories about Jesus. The climax comes at the moment Señora Selina informs Benalisa that a family has chosen her for adoption. The dénouement states the two-fold message of the pamphlet's story: countless other children living on the streets need homes and families to care for them, but they also need to hear the gospel message.

**Figure 4.1. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Benalisa"**



In the exposition of "Benalisa," Vollinger evokes Benalisa's child-like character through the vocal melody, establishes a sense of harmonic and rhythmic instability contributing to the story's underlying tone of uncertainty regarding the lives of the street children, and implements a sparse accompaniment texture that alludes to the scarcity of the children's impoverished lives. One could imagine a child singing along with the repeated B-C-D-C melodic motive that accompanies every sung declamation of Benalisa's name like the simple, stepwise opening melodic motive in the children's nursery rhyme, "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Example 4.1 shows the referenced melodic motive first appearing in the right hand of the accompaniment in m. 1, echoed in the vocal line in m. 2 and repeated again in the vocal melody in mm. 5-6.

**Example 4.1. “Benalisa” mm. 1-6. B-C-D-C melodic motive introduced in accompaniment m. 1 and echoed in vocal melody m. 2 and mm. 5-6 of exposition.**

*Moderato & rubato with childlike simplicity and childlike intensity*

1

*p*

Be-na - li - sa is tir - ed and hun - gry. She can al - ways find a

*p*

*Ped. ad lib*

The repetition of the B-C-D-C motive in the dominant (G major) and prevalence of dominant harmonies destabilizes the feeling of harmonic stability provided by tonic even though “Benalisa” remains tonally in the key of C major. Further, the opening minor 2nd interval of the motive undercuts a sense of diatonicism by hinting at modality and beginning on scale degree seven. Contributing to rhythmic instability, rests on downbeats in the vocal melody and ties over bar lines in the accompaniment cause metric displacement and unpredictability as the story’s plot unfolds.

The restrictive range of the accompaniment and vocal melody along with the repetition of the B-C-D-C melodic motive suggests the confining and cyclical life of poverty. The simple, tonal chords in the piano never span more than a major 10th while the melody lies in the conservative range of a minor 10th (B3-D5) except when the text relays the shocking truths about Benalisa’s guardians and reveals reasons to hope. As the story discloses the grievous news regarding why Benalisa lives on the streets, the melody ascends to F5 and becomes considerably more disjunct in the last phrase of the exposition (Ex. 4.2, mm. 15-18) and the exciting force phrase (Ex. 4.3, mm. 19-23).

**Example 4.2. “Benalisa” mm. 13-18. Disjunct melodic phrase ascending to F5 at the end of the exposition mm. 15-18.**

13

streets of Ma - ni - la. Be - na - li - sa can - not re - mem - ber her par - ents.

**Example 4.3. “Benalisa” mm. 19-23. Disjunct vocal melody ascending to F5 in exciting force phrase mm. 19-23.**

19

When her grand - mo - ther died, she had no place to go...

*subito p*

*subito p*

Even if the street children’s situation remains unchanged, Señora Selina instills hope by faithfully supplying daily food and sharing Jesus’ love for them through the hope-filled gospel message. The melodic phrase in mm. 38-41 in the rising action reflects this hope as the melody ascends to G5 at the mention of Jesus’ name (Ex. 4.4). This phrase also builds intensity through pitch—the octave ascent from G4 to G5 in mm. 39-41—and dynamics crescendoing to *forte* in anticipation of the climax.

**Example 4.4. “Benalisa” mm. 38-41. Melodic phrase octave ascent from G4-G5 crescendoing to *forte* mm. 39-41 in rising action.**

38

day. She brought food and told stories a-bout Je-sus.

*f*

The climactic moment occurs in two parts: the first discloses the news of a family interested in adopting Benalisa and the second reveals her enthusiastic response. In the first section, Vollinger omits the vocal melody replacing it with spoken text notated rhythmically as the singer shifts from narrator to the voice of Señora Selina (Ex. 4.5, mm. 63-70). The spoken text underlines the unexpected news of Benalisa’s adoption, indicates a change in character voices, and allows the audience to hear inflection in Señora Selina’s spoken words according to the singer’s interpretation. Additionally, the spoken text introduces shorter, eighth-note rhythmic values, which more closely match speech rhythms as she relays this news. When the vocal line switches to spoken text, the piano takes over the singer’s melody as a solo melodic line resulting in an even sparser texture than previous sections. This textural variation and melodic exchange highlight the climax through contrast.

**Example 4.5. “Benalisa” mm. 61-70. Spoken text notated rhythmically with shorter, eighth-note durations mm. 63-70 in climax. Sparse accompaniment texture as piano supplies the melody through a solo melodic line mm. 63-69.**

61

*spoken (natural voice)*  
*mp*

Se - li - na said, "Be-na - li - sa, I want you to meet some people.

*mp lyrical, not jumpy*  
*(ped. ad lib.)*

66

They want you to be part of their fam-i - ly and give you a home."

The second part of the climax occurs when the melody line returns with the B-C-D-C motive in m. 71 and ascends to G5 through “breathless” text iterations at a *forte* dynamic crescendoing through “A home at last!” in mm. 74-75, revealing the liberation and hopefulness Benalisa feels toward her changing circumstances (Ex. 4.6). A first-inversion dominant seventh half cadence in m. 75 provides strength to support Benalisa’s exuberance about the promise of a permanent home, yet yearns for resolution (Ex. 4.6). One hopes Benalisa found resolution through the finalization of her adoption; however, the climax ending on a half cadence reminds the listener that other children still long for a similar outcome.

**Example 4.6. “Benalisa” mm. 71-76. Vocal melody returns in climax with B-C-D-C motive beginning the *forte* melodic phrase ascending to G5 with text iterations separated by rests mm. 71-75. Half cadence on V<sup>6/5</sup> ends the climax mm. 75-76.**

The musical score for Example 4.6, "Benalisa" mm. 71-76, is presented in two systems. The top system is the vocal line, and the bottom system is the piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins at measure 71 with a box highlighting measures 71-75. The lyrics under the vocal line are: "Be - na - li - sa couldhard - ly be - lieve it. A home at last!". The piano accompaniment also has a box highlighting measures 75-76, which shows a half cadence on V<sup>6/5</sup>. The score includes dynamics such as *f* breathless and *rit. cresc.*.

The dénouement begins with the opening melodic motive an octave lower in m. 77 as the text states the disheartening reality that many children still need homes (Ex. 4.7). The repetition of the B-C-D-C motive connects these other children to Benalisa and suggests the constant need for families to adopt and provide homes for orphaned children. The ascending phrases of mm. 81-83 and mm. 84-85, paired with crescendoing dynamics, insinuate the importance of learning about Jesus and heaven so the children might optimistically hope amidst their circumstance (Ex. 4.7). Vollinger reserves the strongest cadence for the conclusion of the dénouement. Placed high in the piano's register, the perfect authentic cadence evokes an ethereal sound as it underlines the word "heaven" in Ex. 4.7, m. 85. The song ends with one final iteration of the opening motive in the piano in Ex. 4.7, m. 86, an octave higher than the original statement, alluding to the fact that some children may not find their forever home until reaching heaven, or experience freedom from their life circumstances until that day.

Example 4.7. “Benalisa” mm. 77-86. B-C-D-C motive an octave lower than original statement m. 77. Ascending vocal phrases crescendoing to *forte* mm. 81-83 and mm. 84-85. Perfect authentic cadence (V<sup>6/5</sup> to I) high in piano’s register m. 85. B-C-D-C motive ends dénouement an octave higher than original statement m. 86.

77 *mp* almost like speech *mp*  
 Be - na - li - sa and her friends need homes. They al - so need to hear

82 *f* *mf* *f* *ritard*  
 more a - bout Je - sus and their home in hea - ven.

*mp* *f* *f* *p*



## CHAPTER 5

## “ALICE,” “RUTH,” AND “DADDY VERNE”

“Alice,” “Ruth,” and “Daddy Verne” tell stories about three memorable people from Linda Ferreira’s childhood with prose texts written by Ferreira. When asked why she chose to write about these individuals, Ferreira replied:

Aunt Alice, Ruth, and Daddy Verne made big impressions on me at a very early age. They always stayed in my mind as they were when I was five years old. The texts represent my impression of them at that time – a person who scared me as in Aunt Alice, a person who discovered my first (and last) big theft as in Ruth, and a person who had a big talent and was so good to me as in Daddy Verne.<sup>47</sup>

Ferreira premiered these songs at the Adirondack Festival of American Music during the summer of 2002.<sup>48</sup> A few months later, she recorded them along with Vollinger’s *unaccompanied people*, “Some Things that Haydn Said,” and “The Child in the Hole” on a CD titled *Sound Portraits*.<sup>49</sup> The recording project was funded by a Tennessee Technological University Faculty Research Grant awarded to Ferreira.

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<sup>47</sup> Ferreira, email message, August 19, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> William Vollinger, *Sound Portraits*, with Linda Ferreira, soprano, Anne Thurmond, clarinet, Paul Thurmond, piano, recorded Nov. 9, 2002, Capstone Records CPS-8718, 2003, compact disc.

## “Alice”

**Figure 5.1. Aunt Alice with one of her husbands.**<sup>50</sup>



In “Alice,” Ferreira describes her Aunt Alice, her mother’s eldest sibling, who scared her as a little girl. She initially perceived Alice as a bossy, intimidating, and mad elderly woman; but once Alice started her parakeet and violet business, Ferreira witnessed a gentle, loving side to Alice upon seeing her care for her parakeets. The business eventually dissolved when Alice’s growing attachment to her birds prevented her from selling them. The story explains Alice’s familial relationships, describes her commanding physical presence and eccentric personality, and expresses her affections for her parakeets. The final sentence of the text indicates Alice truly cared for Ferreira and Ferreira’s mother by gifting them a parakeet and violet: possessions Alice cherished and the cornerstone of her business. Ferreira narrates her memory of Alice in the song’s text:

[Exposition] Alice had seven dead husbands, one hundred and seven parakeets, and three hundred African violets. Alice Cunningham Stevens Clark White Cleveland Tilton Sears Potter was my mother’s oldest sister and she always scared her and made her cry. My grandmother Lilly had six children: Alice, Louis, George, Edith, James and my mother Daisy, the baby. Alice was the lucky one. She drew the straw that gave her the family homestead. Alice was very bossy and big. She always wore flowered housedresses, black sensible shoes, thick pink

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<sup>50</sup> Hard copy photo acquired from Linda Ferreira.

stockings, and long beads that clattered and rattled when she walked. Her voice was big and scary. She had a big cough and she was always mad! Her children all turned out bad and mad. Her husbands were all quiet and no one knew why they died, but always wondered.

[Exciting Force] When all of the husbands died, Alice moved to the little house in town where she started the parakeet and violet business. [Rising Action] The parakeets sang, some talked, and when Alice was with her parakeets, she wasn't so loud and mad anymore, except when she talked on the telephone. Alice's house smelled of parakeet and old woman. Beautiful blue, green, white and pinkish parakeets cheeped, squawked, screeched, chirped, flew around the house, played with parakeet toys, and chewed on cuttlebone. They rode on Alice's shoulders, landed on her head and joined her for lunch. They had pretty parakeet names like "Buddy," "Blueboy," "Sweetie" and "Pretty Girl." Mama birds sat on tiny parakeet eggs that hatched ugly.

After a while, Alice was so attached to all of her parakeets that she couldn't sell any of them. The parakeet and violet business became the violet business, and the tiny house became a birdhouse. No one came to buy violets anymore. Alice didn't have to talk to people anymore. She didn't have to be mean or mad or talk on the telephone. She only talked to parakeets because they loved her (loved her).

[Climax] My mother took food to her and bought violets from her once a week for many years. After a long time, Aunt Alice gave me a parakeet and my mother a violet.<sup>51</sup>

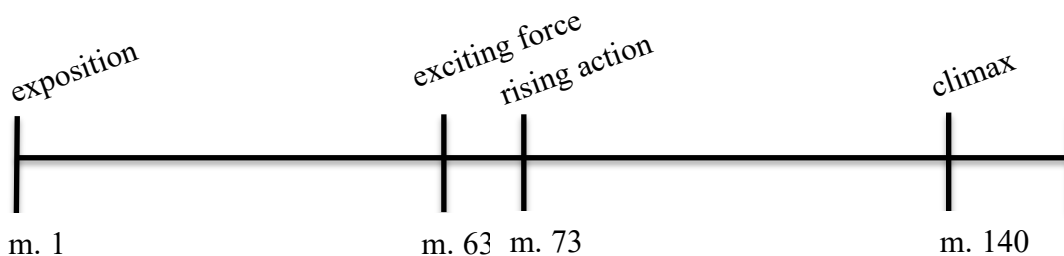
Correlating the text of "Alice" with Freytag's diagram, the exposition lists all seven of Alice's married names, notes the birth order of Alice with her five siblings, and describes Alice's distinctive appearance and eccentric personality. The exciting force occurs when Alice pursues a new business venture selling parakeets and violets following the death of her seventh husband. At the time of her business opening, Ferreira witnesses Alice's demeanor start to change as she finds companionship among her birds in the rising action. Alice decides to stop selling her parakeets because of her adoration for them and live contently in isolation with her beloved birds. In the climax, Ferreira reflects on her mother's kindness toward Alice over the years through her faithful weekly visits

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<sup>51</sup> Linda Ferreira, "Alice," 2002; printed in liner notes to *Sound Portraits*.

and realizes Alice’s true care for her and her mother demonstrated by Alice gifting them two of her most prized possessions.

**Figure 5.2. Freytag’s Structural Divisions for “Alice”**



In the exposition as Ferreira describes her initial perception of Alice, Vollinger musically depicts Alice’s eccentric personality through an ironic musical quotation, unconventional tonality shift, disjunct vocal melody with fragmented phrases, and erratic changes in the accompaniment texture and registration. “Alice” opens with a lilting, lyrical piano introduction in F-sharp major quoting the first line of the chorus tune to “Alice Blue Gown” from the 1919 Broadway musical *Irene*.<sup>52</sup> The chorus text that pairs with the musical quotation reads: “In my sweet little Alice blue gown.”<sup>53</sup> Vollinger chose the “Alice Blue Gown” tune to contrast the casual, sensible attire Aunt Alice wears with the referenced formal, elegant blue gown of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Teddy Roosevelt’s daughter.<sup>54</sup> An abrupt, unprepared modulation to C minor in m. 4—a tritone relation to the first key area—along with the unexpected outburst of Alice’s name at the vocal entrance suddenly interrupts and starkly contrasts the previous lyrical tune (Ex. 5.1). At every iteration of Alice’s name, Vollinger employs the same three-note melodic

<sup>52</sup> Vollinger, liner notes to *Sound Portraits*; Harry Tierney, “Alice Blue Gown,” with Joni James from *Among My Souvenirs*, YouTube, posted July 23, 2012, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsaArOtmvo4>.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph McCarthy, “Alice Blue Gown,” in *Irene* (Toronto: Leo. Feist, 1919).

<sup>54</sup> William Vollinger, personal email correspondence, March 8, 2021.

motive, a wide descending interval of a minor 7th generally comprised of three eighth-notes as seen in Ex. 5.1, m. 4. The “Alice” motive often abruptly emerges from the texture with its lack of melodic preparation following a rest in the vocal line or preceded by a much lower note than the first note of the motive.

**Example 5.1. “Alice” mm. 1-4. Musical quote of “Alice Blue Gown” mm. 1-3. Unprepared modulation from F-sharp major to C minor mm. 3-4. “Alice” motive in vocal melody m. 4 of exposition.**

The musical score for Example 5.1 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a tempo marking of 116. The key signature changes from F# major to C minor between measures 3 and 4. In measure 4, the vocal line features the 'Alice' motive (A - lice) marked 'Wild f'. The middle staff is the right hand of the piano, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The left hand features a seven-note ascending bass line (C2-D2-E2-F2-G2-A2-B2) highlighted with a red box. The right hand also features a similar seven-note ascending line (F#4-G#4-A4-B4-C5-D5-E5) highlighted with a red box. Dynamics include *mp* and *f*.

As the text of the exposition references Alice’s husbands and her siblings, the accompaniment and vocal melody contain notable musical elements subtly underlining these people in Alice’s life. A seven-note ascending bass line in the left hand of the piano represents Alice’s seven husbands, first appearing under the “Alice” motive in Ex. 5.1, m. 4, then repeated in Ex. 5.2, m. 5 and numerous times thereafter.<sup>55</sup>

**Example 5.2. “Alice” mm. 5-6. Seven-note ascending bass line in piano in exposition.**

The musical score for Example 5.2 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a measure number of 5. The key signature is C minor. The vocal line contains the text 'had se - ven dead hus - bands,'. The middle staff is the right hand of the piano, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The left hand features a seven-note ascending bass line (C2-D2-E2-F2-G2-A2-B2) highlighted with a red box. The right hand also features a similar seven-note ascending line (F#4-G#4-A4-B4-C5-D5-E5) highlighted with a red box. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*.

<sup>55</sup> Vollinger, liner notes to *Sound Portraits*.

In m. 26, a six-note cluster chord underlines the mention of the six children in Alice’s family succeeded by the ascending bass line changing to six notes in length as the text lists the names of each child (Ex. 5.3).<sup>56</sup> The varied melodic settings accompanying the statement of each child’s name seem to distinguish the siblings’ individual personalities through Vollinger’s implementation of different pitches, intervals, and note durations.

**Example 5.3. “Alice” mm. 25-32. Six-note cluster chord m. 26. Six-note ascending bass line in piano mm. 27-31. Varied text settings of siblings’ names in vocal melody mm. 27-32 of exposition.**

25  
My grand - mo - ther Lil - ly had six chil - dren: *mp* A - lice, Lou - is,

29  
George, E - dith, James and my mo - ther Dai - sy, the

When the seven-note ascending bass line returns after the listing of Alice’s siblings, it predominates through the rest of the exposition, exciting force, and rising action, suggesting Alice’s constant memory of her husbands.

As the text details Alice’s distinctive appearance and characteristics of her personality, repeated minor 7th intervals link these traits to Alice by echoing her motive. The disjunct minor 7th intervallic leaps appear on “very bossy” (Ex. 5.4, m. 38), “big”

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

(Ex. 5.4, mm. 39-41), “flowered housedresses” (Ex. 5.5, m. 43), and “mad” (Ex. 5.6, mm. 54-55). Additionally, changes in the accompaniment texture, registration, and dynamics in this section of the exposition cause the music to sound erratic. A dense texture comprised of blocked chords in the pianist’s right hand, the seven-note ascending bass line in the left hand, and both hands playing *fortissimo* low in the piano’s register accompanies the text “very bossy” and “big” (Ex. 5.4, mm. 38-41). An unexpected shift to a lighter texture follows with predominantly single notes in each hand and both hands moving to a higher piano octave at *mezzo piano* for the text describing Alice’s “flowered housedresses” and “black sensible shoes” (Ex. 5.5, mm. 42-44). The return to a slightly denser texture occurs with eighth-note descending octave leaps in the right hand and sixteenth-note ascending arpeggios in the left hand as both hands play *fortissimo* low in the piano’s register under the text “mad” (Ex. 5.6, mm. 54-55).

**Example 5.4. “Alice” mm. 38-41. Disjunct minor 7th intervals in vocal melody of exposition. Dense accompaniment texture with blocked chords in right hand and seven-note ascending bass line in left hand. Low piano register at *fortissimo*.**

The musical score for Example 5.4 consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 38 and 39, and the second system covers measures 40 and 41. The vocal line is written in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is written in the bass clef. The key signature is G minor (three flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo). The vocal melody in measure 38 has a disjunct minor 7th interval between the notes A and G. The piano accompaniment features a dense texture with blocked chords in the right hand and a seven-note ascending bass line in the left hand. The piano part is marked *ff* and *8<sup>th</sup>* (eighth notes).

**Example 5.5. “Alice” mm. 42-44. Disjunct minor 7th intervals in vocal melody m. 43 of exposition. Lighter accompaniment texture with predominantly single notes in each hand. Both hands shift to higher piano octave at *mezzo piano*.**

**Example 5.6. “Alice” mm. 53-55. Disjunct minor 7th intervals in vocal melody mm. 54-55 of exposition. Slightly denser accompaniment texture with eighth-note descending octave leaps in right hand and sixteenth-note ascending arpeggios in left hand. Low piano register at *fortissimo*.**

When the text references Alice’s children, minor 7th intervals in Ex. 5.7, mm. 57-58 and a restatement of the same accompaniment from Ex. 5.6, mm. 54-55 in Ex. 5.7, m. 58 correlate Alice’s personality with her children’s mad disposition.

**Example 5.7. “Alice” mm. 56-58. Minor 7th intervals in vocal melody mm. 57-58 of exposition. Restatement of accompaniment from mm. 54-55 in m. 58.**



At the end of the exposition, the accompaniment and final cadence underline the text about Alice's quiet husbands who all died. The seven-note ascending bass line ceases for a few measures at the mention of Alice's deceased husbands (Ex. 5.8, mm. 60-62). A modally ambiguous cadence on the dominant in m. 62 (the piano plays a B-flat chordal third while the vocal melody sings a B-natural) combined with the inconclusive half cadence supports the unresolved statement about the mystery behind Alice's husbands' deaths. A second unexpected modulation follows in m. 63 bridged by a common tone (B-natural) from the key of C minor to B major (Ex. 5.8).

**Example 5.8. "Alice" mm. 60-63. Seven-note ascending bass line in piano ceases mm. 60-62. Modally ambiguous dominant chord at half cadence m. 62. Modulation from C minor to B major bridged by B-natural common tone mm. 62-63 at start of exciting force.**

The image shows a musical score for Example 5.8, consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The score is in C minor. Measures 60-62 show a vocal melody and piano accompaniment. Measure 62 features a half cadence with a B-flat chordal third in the piano and a B-natural in the vocal melody. Measure 63 shows a modulation to B major, bridged by a B-natural common tone. The piano part in measure 63 is marked 'mp' and '1va'.

As Alice establishes her business, paving a new path for her life in the exciting force, Vollinger musically reinforces this transition with a new key area to B major, change in the piano's registration, new motives in the accompaniment and voice, and a vocal melody with slightly more lyricism. When the seven-note ascending bass line representing Alice's husbands resumes in the exciting force and continues through the rising action, it generally appears paired with motives in the accompaniment for Alice's parakeets and violets,<sup>57</sup> layering the memory of her husbands with the significance of her parakeets and violets. A variety of motives set high in the piano's register imitate Alice's

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

parakeets (Ex. 5.9, mm. 70-71) and rolled chords that musically depict flowers blooming, consistently accompany textual references to Alice's violets (Ex. 5.9, mm. 71-73).

**Example 5.9. "Alice" mm. 70-73. Seven-note ascending bass line in piano mm. 70-73. Accompaniment motives for parakeets mm. 70-71 and rolled chords for violets mm. 71-73 in exciting force.**

70

par - a - keet and vi - o - let bus - iness. The

*8va* *p* *1va* *8va* *mp*

*mp*

Vollinger also composes specific motives for Alice's parakeets and violets in the vocal melody. Employed on most statements of these words, he represents the parakeets with a three-note descending stepwise motive (Ex. 5.10, m. 74) and the violets with a three-note motive comprised of an ascending minor 7th followed by a descending minor 3rd (Ex. 5.11, m. 121).

**Example 5.10. "Alice" mm. 74-75. Three-note descending stepwise motive in vocal melody for parakeets m. 74 in rising action.**

74

par - a - keets sang,

**Example 5.11. “Alice” mm. 119-121. Three-note motive with ascending minor 7th and descending minor 3rd in vocal melody for violets m. 121 in rising action.**

When Alice decides to stop selling her parakeets, Vollinger musically highlights this noteworthy event in the rising action by modulating from B major—the key area in the exciting force and beginning of the rising action—to B-flat major in the second part of the rising action, bridged again by a common tone (A-sharp in B major to B-flat in B-flat major).

**Example 5.12. “Alice” mm. 112-113. Modulation from B major to B-flat major bridged by common tone (A-sharp/B-flat) in rising action.**

Earlier in the rising action, Ferreira witnesses Alice’s demeanor start to change after her business opens and as she finds companionship among her birds. In the second part of the rising action, Ferreira further observes Alice’s caring and loving side evidenced by Alice’s inability to continue selling her parakeets because of her adoration for them. In this second section of the rising action, Vollinger rhythmically elongates the

duration of Alice’s motive at both statements of her name resulting in a smoother, gentler text delivery. The short eighth-note rhythms of the original motive become longer durations of a dotted quarter – eighth – quarter note for the first statement of her name (Ex. 5.13, m. 114) and a quarter – quarter – half note for the second (Ex. 5.14, m. 130).

**Example 5.13. “Alice” mm. 112-114. “Alice” motive rhythmically elongated from three eighth-notes to dotted quarter – eighth – quarter note m. 114 in rising action.**

**Example 5.14. “Alice” m. 130. “Alice” motive rhythmically elongated from three eighth-notes to quarter – quarter – half note in rising action.**

Longer phrases and more lyricism than seen in the exciting force and beginning of the rising action transpire in the second part of the rising action and climax as Ferreira further observes Alice’s kindheartedness. To highlight the text of the climax, Vollinger modulates from B-flat major at the end of the rising action, transitioned through a melodic sequence in the voice and piano (Ex. 5.15, mm. 138-139), to A major in the climax.

**Example 5.15. “Alice” mm. 136-139. Modulation from B-flat major to A major transitioned through melodic sequence in voice and piano at end of rising action mm. 138-139.**

136 *mp*  
She on - ly talked to par - a - keets be - cause they loved her. loved her.  
8<sup>va</sup>

*mp*  
*mp* 1<sup>va</sup>  
Red. \* Red. \*

In the climax, Vollinger inverts the three-note descending stepwise parakeet motive in the vocal line to a three-note ascending stepwise motive (Ex. 5.16, m. 148), which achieves a sense of melodic balance to the large, descending leap of Alice’s motive (Ex. 5.16, m. 147).<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the inversion of the parakeet motive and its ascending stepwise motion paired with the ascending piano melody seem to reflect both Alice’s willingness to gift her niece one of her beloved birds and Ferreira’s excitement about receiving it.

**Example 5.16. “Alice” mm. 144-148. Inverted parakeet motive in vocal melody m. 148 melodically balances “Alice” motive m. 147 in climax.**

144 *p*  
week for ma - ny years. Af - ter a long time, Aunt A - lice gave me a par - a - keet

*p*

<sup>58</sup> According to Leonard Meyer’s gap-fill principle for melodies, a disjunct interval—the gap—followed by conjunct motion in the opposite direction—the fill—completes the gap and balances the melodic phrase. Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 144-145.

The text of the climax ends on an unresolved half cadence in m. 150 before the piano postlude abruptly shifts the tonality back to C minor, the exposition's home key (Ex. 5.17). The half cadence at the close of the climax invites the conclusion that Alice's generous gesture symbolized her desire for a continued relationship with Ferreira and Ferreira's mother.

**Example 5.17. "Alice" mm. 149-152. Unresolved half cadence on V<sup>6/5</sup> m. 150 in climax. Abrupt modulation from A major to C minor at piano postlude.**

The musical score for Example 5.17 consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins at measure 149 with the lyrics "and my mother a violet." The melody ends on an unresolved half cadence in measure 150, which is highlighted by a red box. The piano accompaniment features a fortissimo (ff) dynamic marking and an 8va/8vb range marking. The key signature changes from A major to C minor at the start of the piano postlude in measure 151.

The piano postlude that closes the song recalls the erratic tone of the exposition through its *fortissimo* dynamic marking, dense accompaniment texture, and full use of the piano's range. As the postlude musically references the exposition, which accompanies Ferreira's description of Alice's bossy nature and big, scary voice, it suggests Alice's personality did not change as drastically as Ferreira's perception of her.

## “Ruth”

**Figure 5.3. Ruth Sutton with Ferreira’s pet rooster and Betsy Wetsy doll.<sup>59</sup>**



As a child, Ferreira met Ruth when she moved in with Ferreira’s family after losing her husband. Ferreira describes their relationship:

I grew up in a big house that my mother liked to fill with interesting people. Some were boarders and some needed a place to live for a while – students from Africa and refugees from WWII came to live at our house for extended periods of time. When Ruth became a widow, my mother invited her to live with us. That was during the 1940s. She was a tiny person and I loved talking to her and wearing her shoes – until the great chocolate theft when I was sure she was going to eat me up! She was only in my life for the two or three years that she lived in our house.<sup>60</sup>

In “Ruth,” the story recalls an instance where Ruth discovered Ferreira sneaking her chocolates from the candy box. She devised a fable about a cat and mouse to inform Ferreira that she knew of the chocolate theft and teach her a lesson about not stealing.

Ferreira recounts the story in the song’s text:

[Exposition] Ruth came to live at our house when I was five. She was a widow lady and had horse teeth. She worked at the T. B. San and brought all of her furniture to the big bedroom that was really mine. Ruth had tiny feet and let me wear her shoes, and she let me come to visit and eat fancy chocolate candy that she didn’t like; but people always gave her chocolate, because they thought she

<sup>59</sup> Hard copy photo acquired from Linda Ferreira.

<sup>60</sup> Ferreira, email message, August 19, 2016.

liked it, because she never said she didn't. Sometimes when Ruth was at work, I would help her by eating the chocolate. I would go to the cabinet with the glass front, stand on a chair and carefully lift the lid of the special china box that held the candy. I would be sure to check each piece, since the caramel were the ones I liked best. I would punch the bottom only a little, and carefully put it back in the special paper, and arrange all of the pieces in the box so that none looked missing. On the day that only one piece was left, I didn't eat it. Only one in the china box. The next day I ate it. Ruth was invited to eat supper with us downstairs. We talked about shoes but not chocolate. [Exciting Force] After supper, but before dessert, Ruth offered to tell a story:

[Rising Action] "Once upon a time there was a cat and a mouse who had been friends for a long time. They loved walking in the woods and having picnics together by the hollow tree. One day they found a very big piece of cheese, big enough for many picnics. It took a long, long time to carry the cheese to the tree. While they rested, they talked of all the wonderful times they would have eating the cheese. Each morning, while the cat was away catching mice, the mouse walked into the woods and took a nibble of the cheese. One day when the cat and the mouse were having a picnic, the cat mentioned that he had remembered the cheese being bigger, but maybe he had forgotten the actual size. Relieved, the mouse continued to go to the woods alone and nibble the cheese. The cat and the mouse went to the woods for a picnic. In the hollow tree no cheese remained. [Climax] The cat looked in the tree and looked at the mouse and said, 'I see that you have eaten your favorite food, and now I will eat my favorite food.' With that the cat ate up the mouse. The end."

[Resolution] I left the table and didn't eat dessert.<sup>61</sup>

Applying Freytag's Pyramid, the exposition details background information about Ruth and her sweet-natured disposition toward Ferreira, reveals times when Ferreira cleverly sneaks Ruth's chocolates, and elaborates on her deceitful scheme to ensure Ruth would not discover the missing chocolates. Ruth's offer to tell a story marks the exciting force which sets the rising action in motion, the beginning of the fable. In the fable, the cat and mouse find a big piece of cheese and talk of enjoying it together, yet the tempted mouse decides to nibble the cheese while the cat is away catching mice until none remains. At the climax, the cat reveals his discovery of his friend's deception and justifies

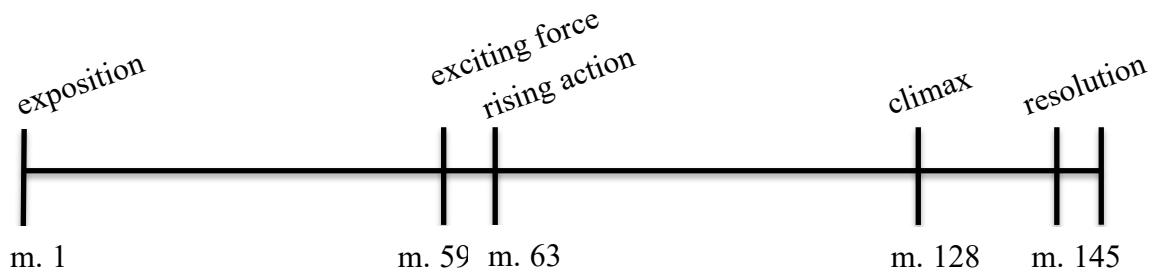
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<sup>61</sup> Linda Ferreira, "Ruth," 1998; printed in liner notes to *Sound Portraits*.



the mouse's impending punishment. The resolution comes when Ferreira understands the lesson and leaves supper, too afraid or guilty to stay for dessert.

**Figure 5.4. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Ruth"**



Vollinger differentiates the two parts of the text, the story of Ferreira's deception and the fable, by setting the exposition with unaccompanied solo voice in F major to contrast the fable scored for voice and piano with an ostinato predominantly in B-flat major. Within the vocal melody of the exposition, Vollinger underlines the significance of Ruth's chocolates by pairing the same melodic motive on words pertaining to her stolen candies. An interval of a descending major 3rd from pitches E5 to C5 or E4 to C4 accompany every repetition of "chocolate" and "candy" (Ex. 5.18, mm. 15-16) as well as text referencing the chocolates (for example "liked best" in Ex. 5.19, m. 37), with an added embellishment on "caramel" reflecting Ferreira's excitement about this flavor (Ex. 5.19, m. 36).

**Example 5.18. "Ruth" mm. 13-16. Descending major 3rd melodic motive E to C mm. 15-16 in exposition.**

The musical notation shows a descending major 3rd melodic motive (E to C) highlighted in a red box. The lyrics are: shoe and she let me come to vis-it and eat fan-cy choc'-late can-dy that she.

**Example 5.19. “Ruth” mm. 36-37. Descending major 3rd melodic motive E to C m. 37 with motive embellished m. 36 in exposition.**

Additionally, the music of the exposition illustrates Ferreira’s sneaky method for stealing Ruth’s chocolates indicated by the “softer and sneakier” marking starting at m. 22, the repetitive B-flat3 “punches” up to C4 on “I would punch the bottom” suggest the manner of her repeated thefts (Ex. 5.20, m. 38), and rests separating the syllables of “carefully” with an ascending glissando—a musical slide—from C4 to F4 in the following measure insinuate how Ferreira slid the chocolates precisely “back in the special paper” (Ex. 5.20, mm. 40-41).

**Example 5.20. “Ruth” mm. 38-41. Repetitive melodic line with B-flat3 “punches” up to C4 m. 38 in exposition. Rests separating syllables m. 40. Ascending glissando C4 to F4 m. 41.**

In the rising action, as the text describes the longevity of the cat and mouse’s friendship and their routine picnics, Vollinger composes an ostinato pattern in the piano alternating between tonic and dominant harmonies that seems to underline their ongoing friendship and repetition of their adventures to the woods for picnics (Ex. 5.21).

**Example 5.21. “Ruth” mm. 63-70. Ostinato pattern alternating between I and V harmonies in rising action.**

63 // *mp playful (at first)*

VOICE

Once up-on a time there was a cat and a mouse who had

PIANO

*sempre pp considerably in the background*

67

been friends for a long time. They loved walk-ing in the woods and hav-ing

Similar to how Vollinger uses repeated melodic motives in the exposition to link words pertaining to Ruth’s stolen candies, he also employs motivic repetition in the vocal melody throughout the rising action to indicate connections within the story. A descending major 2nd from G5 to F5 accompanies every repetition of “picnics” (Ex. 5.22, m. 71) and “nibble” (Ex. 5.23, m. 101) with staccato articulation and a rest separating the syllables of “picnics.” The motivic relation of “picnics” and “nibble” parallels their influence on each other in the story: the mouse’s cheese nibbles ultimately lead to the end of their picnics and friendship.

**Example 5.22. “Ruth” m. 71. Descending major 2nd melodic motive G5 to F5 with staccato articulation and a rest separating syllables of “picnics” in rising action.**

71

pic - nics to -

**Example 5.23. “Ruth” mm. 99-103. Descending major 2nd melodic motive G5 to F5 on “nibble” m. 101 in rising action.**

99

walked in-to the woods and took a nib-ble of the cheese.

*f*

At the end of the rising action, the ostinato ceases immediately preceding the cat’s discovery of the mouse stealing bites of cheese. The interruption of the ostinato pattern (m. 120), rhythmic instability caused by the piano only playing syncopated F6 pitches (mm. 120-122), indication of “a little darker” vocal tone at a *piano* dynamic, and a harmonic shift to F minor (the minor dominant; m. 121) foreshadow a potential change in the cat and mouse’s relationship (Ex. 5.24).

**Example 5.24. “Ruth” mm. 119-122. Ostinato ceases m. 120. Rhythmic instability with syncopated F6 pitches in right hand of piano mm. 120-122 in rising action. Harmonic shift to F minor (minor V) m. 121.**

As the cat realizes the mouse’s deception in the climax, the music modulates to G minor while an unaccompanied vocal line consisting of dissonant tritone intervals illuminates the text revealing the mouse’s guilt (Ex. 5.25). This unaccompanied section leaves the melody exposed which musically parallels the moment the cat exposes his knowledge of the mouse’s theft. Additionally, the unaccompanied measures of the climax connect to the exposition indicating the link between the mouse’s dishonesty and Ferreira’s deception.

**Example 5.25. “Ruth” mm. 128-132. Modulation to G minor in climax. Unaccompanied vocal melody with tritone intervals mm. 129-131.**

At the end of the climax, the piano accompaniment briefly returns until the resolution when the music changes to unaccompanied spoken text without notated

rhythms (Ex. 5.26, mm. 145-147). The return to unaccompanied voice denotes the conclusion of the fable (m. 144) and relates the resolution on the text about Ferreira leaving the dinner table without dessert (mm. 145-147) back to the exposition centered around Ferreira's deception, the motivation behind Ruth's fable (Ex. 5.26). The lack of notation in the resolution allows the singer options as to how to perform the line. One interpretation might include changing the speed of text delivery based on how quickly the singer envisions Ferreira leaving the dinner table. Other interpretations may alter the emphasis of specific words, vocal inflection, or where the text sounds within the performer's spoken range.

**Example 5.26. "Ruth" mm. 143-147. Fable concludes m. 144. Unaccompanied spoken text without notated rhythms mm. 145-147 in resolution.**

143

*ff*

mouse. The end.

*spoken mf*

I left the table and didn't eat dessert.

*ff*

- 7 -

SOLI DEO GLORIA

## “Daddy Verne”

**Figure 5.5. Verne Keesling with one of his chalk drawings.<sup>62</sup>**



Ferreira fondly remembers her childhood neighbor, Verne Keesling, an artist and one of Ferreira’s biggest supporters of her musical aspirations. She describes their relationship and his caring personality:

I was very close to Daddy Verne. When I was an undergraduate, he came to one of my recitals that was entirely contemporary music. He pronounced it to be “contemptible” music, but he still encouraged me and continued to pay for a large portion of my tuition for my degree. He was a wonderful, sweet man – a piano tuner and a founder of the Art League of Danville, Illinois where I grew up. He was always devoted to his wife Hallie who died young and would tear up when he talked about her twenty years after she died. He had beautiful antiques at his house that he left to me.<sup>63</sup>

In “Daddy Verne,” the text illustrates Verne’s fatherly relationship with Ferreira, his encouragement of her musical talents, and his deep affections for the people in his life whom he loved. Ferreira relays her fond memories of Verne in the song’s text:

[Exposition] Verne and Hallie lived next door when I was born. Verne was a piano tuner, a chalk talk artist, and he had a bird that talked. [Exciting Force] Hallie died, and Verne became my Daddy Verne, because he and Hallie always

<sup>62</sup> Hard copy photo acquired from Linda Ferreira.

<sup>63</sup> Ferreira, email message, August 19, 2016.

wanted a little girl just like me! [Rising Action] He was a good friend to my family and tuned the piano that my grandmother bought my mother with egg money. He loved to hear me play the piano and sing, before I could read the notes or reach the pedals. I could put a tear in my voice just like at church. Ooohh... On Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday nights, Verne was a chalk artist for church groups who found inspiration from his God-given talents. At the Spiritualist church, people always found their relatives revealed in the drawings. He could draw Jesus in the garden, Jesus knocking at the door, the Last Supper, and Jesus on the cross. On the easel he would place a very large piece of paper and from a blank page and many hunks of colored chalk, Jesus would come to life. When I learned to read music and reach the pedals, we became a team. I played “I Come to the Garden Alone” and “Near the Cross Near the Cross” and “Break Thou the Bread of Life” and “Bringing in the Sheaves Bringing in the Sheaves.” At the exact dramatic moment, I would sing the hymn and the people would cry at the beauty of it all. Daddy Verne would present the drawings to the church. Some churches had all of the Verne Keesling drawings. [Climax] Daddy Verne bought me a grand piano. He helped me go to college to become a singer, but I didn’t find out about it until years later. [Resolution] He ended his chalk talk drawing career, but always had a bird that talked. When his talking birds died, he put them in a drawer, next to Hallie’s picture. He kept his money in rolls, and hid them around his house, and gave me a map, so I could find it when he died. He died alone in his house, holding Hallie’s picture.<sup>64</sup>

Dividing the text using Freytag’s Pyramid, the exposition explains how Ferreira knew the Keeslings and provides a few facts about Verne. The exciting force occurs when Verne’s beloved wife dies and he begins devoting more time to his relationship with Ferreira. In the rising action, the text discloses how Verne encouraged Ferreira’s passion for singing and playing the piano even before she learned to read music. When her skills improved, they became a team with Ferreira singing and playing hymns as Verne created his chalk drawings. Verne’s encouragement of Ferreira prompted the climactic event when he sacrificially invested in her musical future by buying her a grand piano and financially supporting her music degree. In the resolution, Ferreira reveals Verne’s deep love and care for the people in his life according to how he preserved

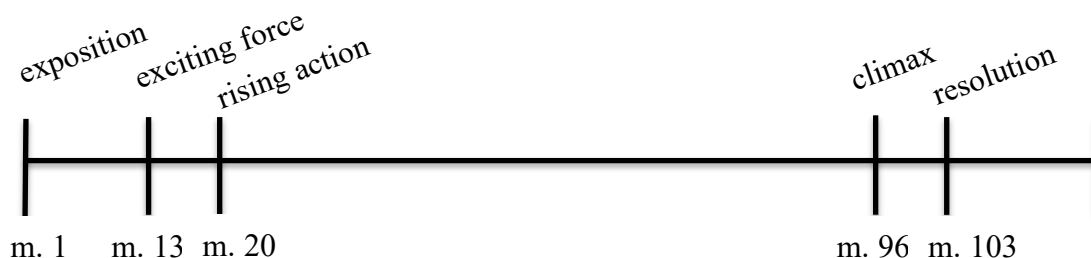
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<sup>64</sup> Linda Ferreira, “Daddy Verne,” 1998; printed in liner notes to *Sound Portraits*.



memories, desired to continue providing financially for Ferreira, and nostalgically died holding his wife's picture.

**Figure 5.6. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Daddy Verne"**



For the music of "Daddy Verne," Vollinger employs the harmonic structure of the hymn "In the Garden" while interlacing direct musical quotations from the hymn's refrain among the story's text.<sup>65</sup> Based on the words from the hymn that align with the excerpted music, the quotations provide subtle commentary on Ferreira's narrative, shown in examples to follow. The refrain of "In the Garden" reads:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
 And He tells me I am His own,  
 And the joy we share as we tarry there,  
 None other has ever known.<sup>66</sup>

The exposition opens with a piano introduction quoting the end of the hymn's refrain with the melody for the text "and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known" (Ex. 5.27, mm. 1-6). This hymn text parallels what the song's story reveals about the joy Verne experienced spending time with Ferreira and lingering on the memories of his beloved wife.

<sup>65</sup> Vollinger, liner notes to *Sound Portraits*.

<sup>66</sup> C. Austin Miles, "In the Garden," 1913; printed on "In the Garden," accessed March 14, 2021, [https://hymnary.org/text/i\\_come\\_to\\_the\\_garden\\_alone](https://hymnary.org/text/i_come_to_the_garden_alone).

**Example 5.27. “Daddy Verne” mm. 1-6. Hymn quotation of “In the Garden” in melody of piano introduction in exposition.**

The musical score for Example 5.27 shows the piano introduction for "Daddy Verne" (mm. 1-6). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 90. The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes the instruction "with feeling, very rubato". The piano introduction is marked with "rit." (ritardando) and "accel." (accelerando). The vocal part (Verne) is marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The piano introduction includes dynamics of forte (*f*), piano (*p*), and mezzo-piano (*mp*).

After Hallie died, Verne enjoyed Ferreira’s company even more and their relationship grew as evidenced by the added endearing title “Daddy” Verne. At the end of the exciting force, the quoted hymn fragment of the text “none other has ever known” in the accompaniment (Ex. 5.28, mm. 19-21), preceded by the “playful” text delivery of “just like me” on an ascending melodic phrase crescendoing to *forte* with staccato sixteenth-notes (Ex. 5.28, mm. 18-19), humorously punctuates Ferreira’s teasing yet boastful declaration that Verne and Hallie always dreamed of a daughter just like her.

**Example 5.28. “Daddy Verne” mm. 18-21. “Playful” ascending melodic phrase crescendoing to *forte* with staccato sixteenth-notes mm. 18-19 in exciting force. Hymn quotation in piano melody mm. 19-21.**

The musical score for Example 5.28 shows the vocal and piano parts for "Daddy Verne" (mm. 18-21). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 90. The vocal part includes the lyrics: "want-ed a lit-tle girl just like me... He was a good friend to my fam-ly and". The piano part includes dynamics of mezzo-forte (*mf*) and mezzo-piano (*mp*). The piano part includes markings for "rit.", "playful", and "conversational *mf*".

The text of the rising action centers around Ferreira’s love for singing, which Verne realized by observing her theatrical performances as a young girl and encouraged with invitations for her musical collaboration during his chalk talks. In the rising action,

Vollinger conveys the drama in Ferreira’s singing using wide intervallic leaps, dynamic contrast, tempo changes, and varied articulation marks. Additionally, the non-syllabic text settings of words or phrases that model Ferreira’s singing juxtapose the primarily syllabic text settings throughout the majority of the song. The long vocal phrase in mm. 26-29 imitates Ferreira’s dramatic performances for Verne with a wide ascending major 9th leap starting the phrase in m. 26 followed by melodic repetition that builds intensity through the raised D-natural pitches in m. 28 and crescendoing melody from *mezzo piano* to *forte* (Ex. 5.29).

**Example 5.29. “Daddy Verne” mm. 26-29. Wide ascending major 9th interval E-flat4 to F5 m. 26 in rising action. Melodic repetition building intensity through raised D-natural pitches m. 28 and crescendoing melody.**

The musical score for Example 5.29 consists of two staves. The upper staff is the vocal line, and the lower staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins in measure 26 with a wide ascending major 9th interval from E-flat4 to F5. The melody continues with melodic repetition and crescendoing intensity through raised D-natural pitches in measure 28, reaching *forte* by measure 29. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line.

A second example of drama in Ferreira’s singing appears in Ex. 5.30, mm. 31-32 as the vocal melody emulates how she could add emotion to her voice. The singer enters *a cappella* at the beginning of the phrase, suggesting Ferreira’s boldness in singing unaccompanied as a child. The phrase continues with a wide ascending leap of a minor 9th on “tear” that chromatically descends over three notes with every pitch marked *sforzando piano* on “voice,” imitating sobs. The accompaniment paired with this melodic phrase contains the hymn quotation referencing the text “and He tells me I am His own”

(Ex. 5.30, mm. 32-33), which underlines Verne’s fatherly love for Ferreira as he joyfully watches her sing.

**Example 5.30. “Daddy Verne” mm. 30-33. Vocal phrase enters *a cappella* with wide ascending minor 9th interval C4 to D-flat5 m. 31 in rising action. Three notes descend chromatically with every pitch marked *sforzando piano* m. 32. Hymn quotation in piano melody mm. 32-33.**

The musical score for Example 5.30 consists of two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 30 with the vocal line playing 'notes or reach the ped-als.' and the piano accompaniment providing harmonic support. At measure 31, the vocal line enters with a wide ascending minor 9th interval (C4 to D-flat5) and the lyrics 'I could put a tear in my voice'. The piano accompaniment continues with a hymn quotation. Red boxes highlight the vocal phrase in measure 31 and the piano accompaniment in measures 32-33. Performance markings include 'rit.', 'with a tear in the voice', 'sfp sfp sfp', and 'pp'.

The hymn quotation continues in the piano with the melody of the text “and the joy we share as we tarry there” (Ex. 5.31, mm. 33-35) paired with a vocal melody again imitating Ferreira’s dramatic singing. The hymn text fragment alludes to Verne’s delight relishing the moments listening to Ferreira perform while the vocal melody reflects how Ferreira might dramatically draw out her performances, shown in the elongation of the “oo” phrase with the *ritardando* in m. 35 and fermata over G5—the chordal 6th of the underlying  $V^7/V$  harmony in A-flat major creating a 6-5 suspension (Ex. 5.31).

**Example 5.31. “Daddy Verne” mm. 33-35. Hymn quotation in piano melody mm. 33-35 in rising action. Elongated phrase with *ritardando* m. 35 and fermata on G5 suspending the chordal 6th of  $V^7/V$  harmony in A-flat major.**

The musical score for Example 5.31 consists of two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 33 with the vocal line playing 'just like at church.' and the piano accompaniment providing harmonic support. At measure 34, the vocal line enters with an elongated phrase 'oo' and the piano accompaniment continues with a hymn quotation. Red boxes highlight the vocal phrase in measure 34 and the piano accompaniment in measures 34-35. Performance markings include 'f', 'rit.', 'glis.', and 'f with feeling, very rubato'.

As the text of the rising action describes Verne's work as a chalk talk artist, Vollinger employs specific text settings to parallel Verne's conversational speech during his drawing presentations and contrast Verne's speaking with Ferreira's dramatic singing. In mm. 36-38, Vollinger writes repeated E-flat4 pitches lower in the singer's range, close to speech range, accompanied by an *accelerando* and rhythms that emulate speech rhythms (Ex. 5.32), while later in the rising action, he incorporates spoken text without notated rhythms to represent Verne's conversational speaking during his chalk talks (Ex. 5.33, mm. 56-57).

**Example 5.32. "Daddy Verne" mm. 36-38. Repeated E-flat4 pitches lower in the singer's range with *accelerando* marking and rhythms emulating speech rhythms in rising action.**

36 *accel.* *p* *f* *mf*  
 On Wednes-day, Sat-ur-day and Sun-day nights, Verne was a chalk ar-tist for  
*accel.*  
*p* *f* *mp*

**Example 5.33. "Daddy Verne" mm. 56-57. Spoken text without notated rhythms in rising action.**

56 *a tempo* *spoken* *mf*  
 On the easel he would place a very large piece of paper and from a  
*a tempo*  
*p*

The rising action concludes with the text describing Ferreira and Verne’s collaboration as an artistic team: singing, playing, and drawing for church group audiences. Vollinger again emulates Ferreira’s singing, this time through hymn tune quotations in the vocal melody of four familiar hymns she presented—“In the Garden,” “Near the Cross,” “Break Thou the Bread of Life,” and “Bringing in the Sheaves”—succeeded by a chanted line (Ex. 5.34, m. 79), which provides the singer interpretive license to freely declaim the text in the way one feels best communicates the drama behind Ferreira’s performances.

**Example 5.34. “Daddy Verne” mm. 78-80. Vocal melody sung dramatically with free rhythms of chant m. 79 in rising action.**

The image shows a musical score for Example 5.34, "Daddy Verne" mm. 78-80. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 78 with a tempo marking of 90. A red box highlights measure 79, labeled "chanted dramatically", with the lyrics "At the exact dramatic moment I would sing the hymn and the". The piano accompaniment includes dynamics like *mf*, *p*, and *f*, and markings like *rit.* and a triplet of 3 notes.

In the climax, an ascending melodic phrase crescendoing to *forte* in mm. 98-99 followed by an abrupt shift to *mezzo piano* on a non-syllabic text setting of “singer” in m. 100 reflects Ferreira’s excitement about Verne’s support of her musical aspirations and a future career catering to her love for the dramatic (Ex. 5.35). The stark contrast in the succeeding vocal phrase starting with the conjunction “but” in the text and low, repeated E-flat4 pitches descending to D4 at a *piano* dynamic (Ex. 5.35, mm. 101-102) insinuates Ferreira’s regret for not learning of Verne’s financial contribution to her education until years later, delaying opportunities to express her gratitude.

Example 5.35. “Daddy Verne” mm. 98-102. Ascending melodic phrase crescendoing to *forte* mm. 98-99 in climax. Immediate shift to *mezzo piano* on non-syllabic text setting of “singer” m. 100. Low, repeated E-flat4 pitches descending to D4 at *piano* dynamic in vocal melody mm. 101-102.

The musical score for Example 5.35, “Daddy Verne” mm. 98-102, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 98-100, and the second system covers measures 101-102. The key signature is two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. Dynamics are indicated by *f* (forte) and *mp* (mezzo piano). The lyrics are: “helped me go to col - lege to be - come a sing er,” and “but I did - n't find out a - bout it un - til years la - ter.”

Amidst the fulfillment Verne found spending time with Ferreira, he still sought to preserve the memory of his wife. A final quoted melodic phrase from the “In the Garden” hymn appears in the resolution on the text “and the joy we share as we tarry there” as the story’s text explains how Verne died holding his wife’s picture. The hymn quotation occurs during a two-measure piano interlude between the text “He died alone in his house” and “holding Hallie’s picture.” In these two measures, the accompaniment actively participates in the story by stating text from the hymn that reiterates the happiness Verne felt remembering Hallie. The song ends on an unresolved dominant seventh half cadence in A-flat major, high in the piano’s register, supporting the idea that

ultimate fulfillment for Verne might be achieved through a reunion with his wife after his death (Ex. 5.36, mm. 124-125).

**Example 5.36. “Daddy Verne” mm. 123-125. Unresolved half cadence on V<sup>7</sup> in A-flat major high in piano’s register mm. 124-125 at end of resolution.**

123 *p*

hold - ing Hal - lie's pic - ture.

*p*



## CHAPTER 6

*ACTS OF KINDNESS*

Inspired by hearing about random acts of kindness, Vollinger crafted the idea of composing a song cycle featuring stories about people showing compassion for others. He compiled stories from a variety of sources then wrote his own texts in prose and formed the song cycle titled *Acts of Kindness*. Dr. Tracy Rhodus Satterfield, soprano, who premiered the work in 2006, wrote a blog entry about the cycle:

Yesterday I recorded a composer's recital featuring new art songs. There was one set of songs by William Vollinger called *Acts of Kindness* that was particularly moving. There are seven songs in the cycle. The music is surprisingly tonal in parts, and is constructed as a set of seven variations with each song set in a key a fourth higher than the previous one. It was interesting listening to this music and being surprised at how much the tonal aspects jugged out—consequence of being accustomed to modern music now I suppose. The text comes from various true stories of acts of kindness, some small, some great. Normally, I have a hard time paying attention to words in music, but this was perhaps the first time song lyrics have touched me so much. The last one made me cry.<sup>67</sup>

As mentioned by Satterfield, Vollinger constructed the cycle as seven variations over a seven-chord chaconne. The harmonic progression (i-V<sup>6</sup>-V<sup>4/2</sup>/IV-IV<sup>6</sup>-V<sup>6/5</sup>/V-i<sup>6/4</sup>-V) remains largely consistent throughout the cycle—though chord inversions vary frequently—until the final song, “Second Sacrifice,” when Vollinger adapts the chaconne to accommodate a pentatonic melody. An occasional chord substitution appears in the progression but they happen so infrequently and seem to carry no apparent connection to the text, so the analysis does not mention these rare occurrences. In “Two Necklaces” for instance, the chaconne repeats eight times with three chord substitutions—a vii-dim chord replaces a V chord in the progression’s fourth and fifth iterations and a VI chord replaces a iv chord in the fifth repetition of the chaconne. Regardless, Vollinger achieves

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in William Vollinger, “Reviews and Articles,” accessed February 25, 2020, <http://www.williamvollinger.com/Reviews.html>.

unity throughout the cycle with the chaconne, relation of key areas between songs, and subject content.

In the following song texts that comprise *Acts of Kindness*, the essence of Freytag remains even though these shorter song texts do not align as well with all the parts of Freytag's diagram as do the longer song texts of "Benalisa," "Alice," "Ruth," and "Daddy Verne." Yet, in order to maintain analytical consistency across the document, and still highlight the most pertinent elements of Freytag present in the song cycle, the following analysis employs an abridged version of Freytag's Pyramid. The truncated model reduces the original seven structural divisions to three—exposition, climax, and resolution—except in "First Journey" and "Second Journey" which contain only two divisions—exposition and climax—since these texts conclude immediately after the climactic moment.

### **“Bridge and Roses”**

The text of “Bridge and Roses” came from a story told by Reverend Peter Olsen, a member of Vollinger’s church and a former pastor.<sup>68</sup> Reverend Olsen is the unnamed man introduced at the onset of the story who appears weary and downcast until he notices a beautiful rose garden by a bridge. His perspective changes after seeing the rose garden and learning about the garden owner’s purpose for planting the roses. After someone once committed suicide jumping off the bridge, the garden owner hoped the roses’ splendor would dissuade anyone else from doing the same by opening one’s eyes to the beauty of life. Vollinger retells Reverend Olsen’s story in the song’s text:

[Exposition] A man was having a difficult time. So he went for a walk to collect his thoughts and then came to a bridge. Looking down he noticed a rose garden by the river in the backyard of a house. It was a beautiful garden. He walked by the house, just to tell the owner how beautiful the garden was. [Climax] The owner explained that someone had once jumped off that bridge. [Resolution] That was why the owner planted the rose garden, in case someone else ever came to that bridge for the same reason, so that they’d see the beautiful roses and not jump.<sup>69</sup>

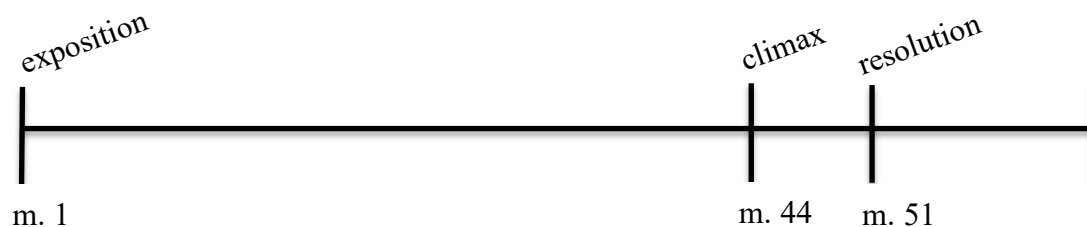
Comparing the text with Freytag’s diagram, the exposition sets the scene by introducing a man struggling in a difficult season who comes across a bridge on his walk, looks down from the bridge, and sees a beautiful rose garden. In the climactic moment, the man learns how the significance of the bridge correlates to the inspiration behind the rose garden when the house owner informs the man of someone who once committed suicide jumping off that bridge. As a result, in the resolution, the owner decides to plant a rose garden hoping its allure would deter others from following the same path.

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<sup>68</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, December 13, 2016.

<sup>69</sup> William Vollinger, “Bridge and Roses,” 2005; printed on “Acts of Kindness,” accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).

**Figure 6.1. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Bridge and Roses"**



The exposition opens in E minor with a seven-measure piano introduction that establishes the seven-chord chaconne of the song cycle and musically evokes the indicated "solemn" tone for the man's contemplative state with slow whole-note durations at a *mezzo piano* dynamic (Ex. 6.1, mm. 1-7).

**Example 6.1. "Bridge and Roses" mm. 1-7. Piano introduces seven-chord chaconne in E minor mm. 1-7 in exposition. Slow whole-note durations at *mezzo piano* with indicated "solemn" tone.**

**1. BRIDGE AND ROSES**

$\bullet = 112$  with a solemn massive feeling

*mp*

*mp*

*Ped. ad lib throughout*

At the vocal entrance, the chromatically weaving melodic line around B4 (Ex. 6.2, mm. 7-9) implies the man's wandering thoughts and alludes to a restless state of mind. In the following phrase, the repeated pitches on E4 along with the repetitive rhythmic pattern of three quarter-notes followed by a quarter-rest (Ex. 6.2, mm. 10-13) suggest the monotony of the walk he hopes will bring clarity to his thoughts.

**Example 6.2. “Bridge and Roses” mm. 7-13. Vocal melody weaving chromatically around B4 mm. 7-9 of exposition. Repeated E4 pitches with repetitive rhythmic pattern of three quarter-notes followed by a quarter-rest mm. 10-13.**

Upon seeing the rose garden, the music of the exposition reflects a change in the man’s perspective. The ironic setting of an *ascending* octave leap from E4 to E5 in the vocal melody on the text “looking down” (Ex. 6.3, mm. 19-21) suggests that only after looking down and seeing the rose garden did the man’s outlook begin to look up. Additionally, the accompaniment texture and transition to major tonality supports the man’s shifting perspective. The sudden change from low descending octaves in the bass (m. 19) to the left hand completely dropping out (mm. 20-22) isolates and illuminates the high register played by the right hand (Ex. 6.3). When the left hand returns in m. 23, the registration remains high in the treble clef. The high piano register aids in highlighting both the beauty of the roses and the text’s desire that the protagonist will find hope amidst his difficult situation. The transition from E minor to E major occurs gradually as a single E6 pitch in the accompaniment of m. 20 followed by the omission of the tonic chordal third in m. 21, creates a sense of modal ambiguity until a complete E major chord appears in m. 22 (Ex. 6.3). E major continues throughout the remainder of the exposition as the man abandons his previous downcast state.

**Example 6.3. “Bridge and Roses” mm. 19-25. Ascending octave interval E4-E5 in vocal melody mm. 19-21 in exposition. Pianist’s left hand drops out mm. 20-22 isolating high register of piano in right hand. Left hand returns m. 23 in treble clef. Gradual transition from E minor to E major mm. 20-22.**

In the climax, the chromatically weaving vocal melody around B4 returns in Ex. 6.4, mm. 44-45 but, this time, it suggests the owner’s unsettled feelings about the suicide as the owner recalls the event and discloses this heartbreaking news to the man. The ascending melodic contour crescendoing to *forte* by G5 (mm. 46-48), heightens the shock of the owner’s news, while the descending contour paired with the piano’s low descending bass octaves (mm. 48-50) musically depicts the person’s physical descent from the bridge (Ex. 6.4). Vollinger composes a wide range between the pianist’s right and left hands in Ex. 6.4, mm. 46-50 echoing the long distance of the victim’s jump.

**Example 6.4. “Bridge and Roses” mm. 44-50. Vocal melody chromatically weaving around B4 mm. 44-45 in climax. Ascending melodic contour crescendoing to *forte* by G5 mm. 46-48 followed by descending contour mm. 48-49. Low descending octaves in bass line of piano mm. 48-50 with wide range between right and left hands of piano mm. 46-50.**

As the resolution expresses the owner's desire for the rose garden to awaken others to the beauty of life amidst their seemingly hopeless situation, the vocal melody and high piano register reflect the owner's hopefulness. On the text that references others seeing the beautiful roses (Ex. 6.5, mm. 61-63), the vocal phrase leaps an octave (E4-E5) to "see," then maintains a high vocal tessitura as it crescendos to *forte* accompanied by a high piano register ending the song on a hopeful note.

**Example 6.5. "Bridge and Roses" mm. 60-65. Vocal melody leaps an octave E4-E5 mm. 61-62 then maintains a high vocal tessitura while crescendoing to *forte* mm. 62-63 in resolution. High piano register mm. 61-65.**

60

same rea-son, so that they'd see the beau-ti-ful ro-ses and not jump.

*f* *mf* *attaca*

*mp* *f* *mf*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

### “Two Necklaces”

Vollinger found the story that inspired “Two Necklaces” on the internet. The story tells of how Kayla proudly wears her cheap, plastic necklace to school every day until she notices another girl’s prettier necklace and becomes jealous. Then Kayla witnesses the tragedy of the other girl’s favorite necklace broken by the hands of a reckless boy. She selflessly offers the other girl her own necklace and observes her new friend proudly don her less extravagant necklace. The story of the girls’ new friendship over a necklace debacle follows:

[Exposition] When Kayla was in kindergarten she wore a cheap plastic glitter necklace everyday. Kayla thought another girl’s necklace looked prettier than her own. It had wood beads and gold beads and silver beads. She wore it everyday too. [Climax] One day a rough boy pulled off that girl’s necklace and the beads went rolling everywhere. The girl cried. They could not find all the beads. The next day the girl had no necklace on. Her neck looked so bare. [Resolution] So Kayla gave her her own cheap plastic glitter necklace to wear. Her new friend wore it proudly everyday.<sup>70</sup>

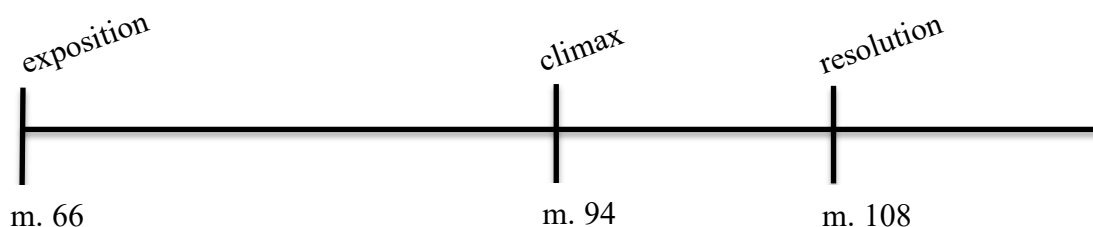
Viewed through Freytag’s Pyramid, the exposition notes Kayla’s age and expresses her delight in wearing her favorite necklace until the allure of another girl’s necklace causes jealousy. The climactic and devastating event occurs when the rough boy breaks the other girl’s necklace beyond repair. Kayla’s sympathy for the girl’s situation leads to the resolution when she selflessly gives the girl her own, favorite necklace to wear.

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<sup>70</sup> William Vollinger, “Two Necklaces,” 2005; printed on “Acts of Kindness,” accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).



**Figure 6.2. Freytag’s Structural Divisions for “Two Necklaces”**



In “Two Necklaces,” Vollinger captures the youthfulness of the characters through fragmented text delivery resembling how a child might deliver the story with animation and spontaneity. In the exposition, for example, Vollinger’s setting of “everyday” (consistently written as one word) suggests Kayla’s excitement about wearing her favorite necklace as an everyday accessory (Ex. 6.6, m. 80). The fragmentation of the word—syllables separated by eighth-rests—along with the high, repeated E5 pitches emphasize each syllable equally, imitating how Kayla might proudly underline the frequency of wearing her favorite necklace. The exposition also establishes the significance of Kayla’s necklace to the story by depicting its glittering quality in the accompaniment with ascending sixteenth-note major chord arpeggios set high in the piano’s register under the word “necklace” (Ex. 6.6, m. 79).

**Example 6.6. “Two Necklaces” mm. 79-80. Fragmented text setting of “everyday” with syllables sung on repeated E5 pitches separated by eighth-rests m. 80 in exposition. Ascending sixteenth-note major chord arpeggios set high in piano’s register m. 79.**

The musical score for Example 6.6 shows two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 79 shows the vocal line with the lyrics "neck-lace" and the piano accompaniment with ascending sixteenth-note major chord arpeggios. Measure 80 shows the vocal line with the lyrics "eve-ry-day." and the piano accompaniment with a continuation of the arpeggios. Red boxes highlight the arpeggios in measure 79 and the fragmented text in measure 80.

At the climax, when the rough boy approaches, the music modulates from A major to A minor by m. 95 and suddenly transitions from broken arpeggiated figures higher in the piano's register at *mezzo forte* (mm. 91-93) to a minor 2nd sixteenth-note turning figure lower in the piano's register at a *piano* dynamic (m. 94), evoking a menacing tone as the boy draws near (Ex. 6.7).

**Example 6.7. “Two Necklaces” mm. 91-94. Broken arpeggiated figures higher in piano's register at *mezzo forte* in mm. 91-93 at end of exposition transitions to minor 2nd sixteenth-note turning figure lower in piano's register at *piano* m. 94 in climax.**

91 *mf* *mp*

She wore it eve - ry - day too. One

*mf* *p*

After the boy pulls off the girl's necklace in the climax, sixteenth-note piano figures quickly bounce between the bass and treble clef in Ex. 6.8, m. 98 creating disjunct motion as if to reference the beads rolling everywhere. The forward momentum halts swiftly in Ex. 6.8, m. 99 as the girl pauses to mourn her broken necklace. The vocal melody in Ex. 6.8, mm. 99-101 reveals the girl's dramatic and sorrowful response to the rough boy breaking her necklace with an abrupt *forte* entrance on D-sharp<sup>5</sup>—an augmented sixth interval higher than the end of the previous phrase—that quickly ascends high to A<sup>5</sup>, immediately leaps down an octave to A<sup>4</sup>, then crescendos through the end of the phrase on G-sharp<sup>4</sup>.

**Example 6.8. “Two Necklaces” mm. 98-102. Disjunct motion created with sixteenth-note piano figures quickly bouncing between bass and treble clef m. 98 in climax. Forward momentum halts in accompaniment m. 99. Vocal melody abruptly enters *forte* on D-sharp5, an augmented sixth interval higher than previous phrase ending mm. 98-99. *Forte* phrase ascends to A5, descends an octave to A4, then crescendos through end of phrase on G-sharp4 mm. 99-101.**

98  
 beads went rolling eve-ry-where. The girl cried. They could not find all the beads. 8va --  
 mp 3  
 f mp p

When Kayla decides to selflessly give the other girl her own necklace, in the resolution, and the text again describes the features of Kayla’s necklace, the accompaniment returns to broken arpeggiated figures primarily high in the piano’s register with the ascending sixteenth-note major chord arpeggios once more illustrating the sparkling quality of Kayla’s necklace. Vollinger’s short melismatic vocal settings of the first two “to wear” text repetitions that crescendo through the sustained third repetition (mm. 116-119), paired with the ascending *forte* arpeggio in the piano (mm. 118-119), reflect his interpretation of Kayla’s exuberance upon observing her new friend proudly wear her thoughtful gift (Ex. 6.9).

**Example 6.9. “Two Necklaces” mm. 116-119. Short melismatic passages on first two “to wear” text repetitions crescendo through sustained third repetition mm. 116-119 in resolution. Ascending *forte* arpeggio in piano m. 118-119.**

116  
 to wear. to wear. to wear.  
 f  
 f

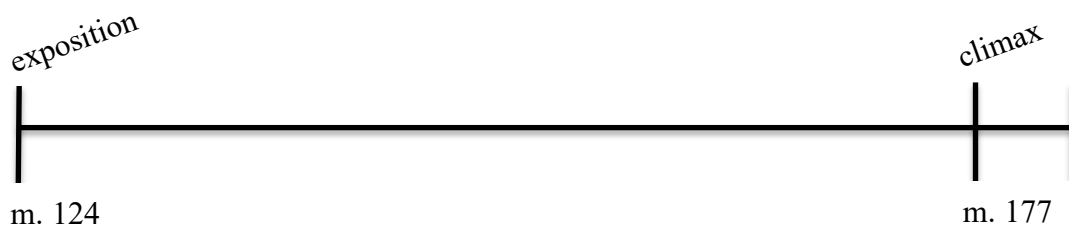
### “First Journey”

The inspiration for “First Journey” originated from a story told by Vollinger’s friend Raymond Beegle. Set during the Third Reich in Nazi Germany, the text tells of a Jewish man, exhausted from his journey through the town, who asks a German woman at a vegetable stand for some tomatoes. She willingly complies with the Jewish man’s request yet presumably, does so discreetly because if caught helping a Jew, she would endure costly consequences for her brave and caring act. Although not specified in the text, Vollinger identified the lady as a non-Jewish German woman in one of his interviews.<sup>71</sup> The song’s text highlights the German woman’s kindness:

[Exposition] It was the start of the Third Reich. A Jewish man had walked through the town to the other side. He was tired. He came to a vegetable stand. He saw some tomatoes. Jews only got ration tickets for radishes. He said, “I suppose I couldn’t have any of those tomatoes?” [Climax] But the lady smiled and said, “Of course you can have some tomatoes.”<sup>72</sup>

Aligning the text of “First Journey” with Freytag’s diagram, the exposition identifies the historical context for the story and tells of the Jewish man’s wearisome journey through town to the forbidden other side. When he finally arrives at a vegetable stand and asks the lady for some tomatoes, her kind response and willingness to serve a Jewish man regardless of the sacrifice functions as the climactic moment.

**Figure 6.3. Freytag’s Structural Divisions for “First Journey”**



<sup>71</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, April 22, 2016.

<sup>72</sup> William Vollinger, “First Journey,” 2005; printed on “Acts of Kindness,” accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).

Prior to the exposition’s opening reference to the Nazi regime, the marcato articulation, *fortissimo* dynamics, fairly dense chordal texture, disjunct bass line with octaves low in the piano’s register, and driving rhythms using two repeated rhythmic motives found in the piano introduction establishes the indicated “scary, stentorian feeling” (see Ex. 6.10, mm. 126-127 for rhythmic motive one, mm. 128-129 for rhythmic motive two).

**Example 6.10. “First Journey” mm. 124-129. Indicated “scary, stentorian feeling” in piano introduction of exposition. Marcato articulation, *fortissimo* dynamics, fairly dense chordal texture, disjunct bass line with octaves low in piano’s register, driving rhythms with two repeated rhythmic motives mm. 126-129. Rhythmic motive one mm. 126-127. Rhythmic motive two mm. 128-129.**

124 *same tempo, with a scary stentorian feeling*

The musical score for Example 6.10 consists of three systems. The first system (measures 124-125) shows a piano introduction in D minor, marked *p*. The second system (measures 126-127) is marked *ff marcato* and features a disjunct bass line with octaves low in the piano's register. The third system (measures 128-129) continues the driving rhythms with two repeated rhythmic motives. Red boxes highlight the bass line in measures 126-127 and 128-129.

Vollinger reveals the man’s surprise and excitement upon seeing the vegetable stand, in the exposition, through the unexpected entrance of the B-natural<sup>4</sup> in the vocal melody paired with the disjunct accompanying piano figures (Ex. 6.11, m. 167). In the tonic key of D minor, although the B-natural belongs to D melodic minor and functions as the chordal 9th of the supporting dominant harmony in m. 167, the shock of its entrance comes through a lack of melodic preparation—entering after a rest and a major 6th interval higher than the previous note—and following a stagnant melodic line with pitch repetition on D<sup>4</sup>. The accompaniment of m. 167, with its high piano register,

ascending arpeggio in the left hand, and disjunct octave leaps in the right hand, implies the man's excitement about finding food after his tiresome journey.

**Example 6.11. "First Journey" mm. 163-167. Stagnant vocal melody with D4 pitch repetition mm. 164-166 followed by melodically unprepared B-natural4 m. 167 entering after a rest and a major 6th interval higher than previous note m. 166 in exposition. High piano register, ascending arpeggio in left hand, disjunct octave leaps in right hand m. 167.**

The image shows a musical score for Example 6.11, "First Journey" mm. 163-167. The score is in 3/4 time and features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with "He was ti-red. He" and continues with "came to a vege-ta-ble stand." in measures 165-167. The piano accompaniment includes an ascending arpeggio in the left hand and disjunct octave leaps in the right hand in measure 167. Red boxes highlight the vocal melody in measure 167 and the piano accompaniment in measure 167.

Vollinger musically distinguishes the Jewish man's request for tomatoes at the end of the exposition from the German woman's response in the climax. The vocal setting of the man's question suggests timidity in his demeanor through the modest melodic range that primarily fluctuates between A4 and G-sharp4 with frequent interspersed rests resulting in fragmented text delivery and portraying how he apprehensively asks for tomatoes (Ex. 6.12, mm. 173-176). The sparse accompaniment texture under the man's words transparently exposes his question as he risks requesting provisions from the German woman.

**Example 6.12. “First Journey” mm. 173-176. Vocal melody primarily fluctuates between A4 and G-sharp4 with frequent interspersed rests mm. 173-176 in exposition. Sparse accompaniment texture mm. 173-176.**

ra-di-shes. He said, "I suppose I could-n't have a-ny of those to-ma-toes?"

For the climactic moment of the story, the music indicates the woman's willingness to help the man through the crescendoing octave ascent (F-sharp4 to F-sharp5) in the vocal melody paired with a denser, more supportive accompaniment texture that also crescendos as it ascends (Ex. 6.13, mm. 177-180). The woman's succeeding "half-whispered" line of spoken text with notated rhythms reveals her discreet reply as she cautiously avoids drawing attention to her conversation (Ex. 6.13, mm. 181-182).

**Example 6.13. “First Journey” mm. 177-183. Vocal melody ascends an octave F-sharp4 to F-sharp5 while crescendoing *piano* to *forte* with denser accompaniment texture that also crescendos while ascending mm. 177-180 in climax. “Half-whispered” spoken text with notated rhythms mm. 181-182.**

*p* warmly But the la-dy smiled and said, "Of course you can have some to-ma-toes." *attaca*

### “Second Journey”

Vollinger learned about the story relayed in “Second Journey” from Raymond Beegle but the original source, Nadezhda Mandelstam’s autobiography *Hope Abandoned*, documents a detailed account of her friendship with the cobbler Sergei Ivanovich.<sup>73</sup> The song’s text references Osip Mandelstam, a renowned Russian poet during Stalin’s regime, who composed a satirical poem about Stalin in November 1933 that led to Osip’s arrest and eventual exile to Voronezh, Russia with his wife Nadezhda.<sup>74</sup> They returned to Moscow when his exile ended in 1937, but in May 1938 he was rearrested as part of Stalin’s “Great Purge” and sentenced to forced labor in a transit camp where he died at age 47.<sup>75</sup> After Osip’s death, Nadezhda avoided arrest by leading an itinerant life—teaching English in numerous Russian provincial towns—until she was allowed to return to Moscow in 1964.<sup>76</sup> While residing in Tashkent during this transient time, Nadezhda met the impressionable cobbler who bestowed kindness on her by promising to always provide her with shoes. In *Hope Abandoned* Nadezhda wrote:

Needless to say, [the cobbler] remains in my mind because of something more important and elevated than the problem of my footwear, namely because he showed kindness and sympathy rarely met in life—particularly in mine. Only thanks to such encounters I did not lose my faith in people. As long as there are some like him, life still has a little warmth, the human qualities are not yet totally extinguished.<sup>77</sup>

The song’s text about the Mandelstams and the generous cobbler follows:

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<sup>73</sup> Nadezhda Mandelstam, “A Kind Person,” in *Hope Abandoned*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1974), 596-606.

<sup>74</sup> J. M. Coetzee, “Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode,” *Representations* 35 (Summer 1991): 72, *JSTOR*, accessed March 25, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Tracy, introduction to *Osip Mandelstam’s Stone*, by Osip Mandelstam, trans. Robert Tracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 13.

<sup>76</sup> Clarence Brown, introduction to *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir*, by Nadezhda Mandelstam, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1970; reprint, New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1983), vii-viii.

<sup>77</sup> Mandelstam, 601.



[Exposition] Osip Mandelstam, Russia's great poet, wrote a poem, privately circulated, critical of Stalin. He was sentenced to forced labor. He died as a result, and his widow was forced to travel from one province to another, till her shoes got so worn they barely hung to her feet. She found a cobbler in one small city where she was hiding. She told him the story of her love, her fear and her sorrow. [Climax] He looked at her and said, "You'll never go without shoes again."<sup>78</sup>

Correlating the text of "Second Journey" with Freytag's model, the exposition provides the context for Nadezhda's story by noting her husband, Osip's significance in Russia's history, his rebellion to Stalin's artistic censorship, and sentencing to a forced labor camp where he dies. Along Nadezhda's travels avoiding arrest, she finds a cobbler in one provincial town to repair her worn shoes and shares her story with him. He sympathizes with her situation and the climactic moment arrives when he promises to always provide Nadezhda with shoes.

**Figure 6.4. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Second Journey"**



In the exposition, as the text recounts Nadezhda's continuous travels, strategically notated rests in the vocal line after short two-measure phrases (Ex. 6.14, m. 207, m. 209, m. 211) insinuate her physical fatigue and need for intermittent breaks, while the accompaniment depicts the manner of her wearisome journeys. The meandering motion of the bass line (Ex. 6.14, mm. 202-210) suggests her aimless wandering from one province to the next. In contrast, the descending sixteenth-note scale found in the right hand of the piano (Ex. 6.14, m. 209) possesses more directional intention and perhaps

<sup>78</sup> William Vollinger, "Second Journey," 2005; printed on "Acts of Kindness," accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).

represents Nadezhda hastily running from those who might arrest her. Her manner of travel appears to change again in mm. 211-214 as the octave leaps in the bass clef with tenuto markings evoke her plodding steps and reinforce the text's reference to shoes barely hanging from her feet (Ex. 6.14).

**Example 6.14. "Second Journey" mm. 202-214. Rests in vocal line after short two-measure phrases m. 207, m. 209, m. 211 in exposition. Meandering motion of bass line mm. 202-210. Descending sixteenth-note scale in right hand of piano m. 209. Octave leaps in bass clef with tenuto markings mm. 211-214.**

202  
wi - dow. . . was forced to tra - vel from one pro - vince to a -

208  
no - ther, till her shoes got so worn they bare-ly hung - nngg to her feet.

214

As Nadezhda finds a cobbler to fix her worn shoes and with whom to share her story, Vollinger's text setting of this phrase in Ex. 6.15, mm. 221-225 expresses Nadezhda's excitement about disclosing the details of her past with a new acquaintance she trusts. The vocal melody initially ascends through an octave glissando (D4 to D5) and continues to ascend to G5 on "story" as the voice and piano crescendo to *forte* (Ex. 6.15, mm. 221-223), while the left hand of the piano plays an ascending arpeggio under the vocal glissando (Ex. 6.15, m. 221).

**Example 6.15. “Second Journey” mm. 220-225. Vocal melody ascends through octave glissando D4 to D5 and continues to ascend to G5 as voice and piano crescendo to *forte* mm. 221-223 in exposition. Ascending arpeggio in left hand of piano m. 221.**

The image shows a musical score for Example 6.15, "Second Journey" mm. 220-225. The score is in G minor, 2/4 time. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The vocal line starts at m. 220 with the lyrics "hid - ing." and continues with "She told him the sto - ry of her love, her". The piano accompaniment features an ascending arpeggio in the left hand of m. 221. The score includes dynamic markings (f, mf) and performance instructions like "with emotion" and "slight glis.".

For the story’s climax, Vollinger highlights the cobbler’s hope-filled promise to continually provide Nadezhda with shoes by shifting to the parallel major key, varying the piano’s registration, and employing an ascending vocal melody spanning a wide range. Throughout the song, tonality remains in G minor until the climax when the E-natural in m. 233 anticipates the G major tonality firmly established by m. 234 with a tonic G major chord (Ex. 6.16). Underlining the cobbler’s words, Vollinger sets the accompaniment in a higher register with both hands in the treble clef gradually rising in pitch (Ex. 6.16, mm. 233-238) supporting the ascending vocal line that spans a wide range of a perfect 11th from D4 to G5 (Ex. 6.16, mm. 233-236). The shift in modality from minor to major, higher range of the piano, and ascending vocal melody mirror Nadezhda’s hope in the cobbler’s promise.

**Example 6.16. "Second Journey" mm. 233-238. E-natural in m. 233 anticipates G major tonality established with tonic G major chord m. 234 in climax. Higher piano register gradually rising in pitch mm. 233-238. Vocal melody spans wide range of perfect 11th from D4 to G5 mm. 233-236.**

233 *mp dolce*

"You'll ne - ver go with - out shoes a - gain."

*mp* *p*

### “Freedom Begun”

Vollinger derived the story for “Freedom Begun” from Frederick Douglass’s autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.<sup>79</sup> The text recounts the mistreatment Douglass endured as a young slave boy living on a plantation in Talbot County, Maryland.<sup>80</sup> Around age seven or eight, his master sent him to serve Mr. Hugh Auld in Baltimore where his quality of life drastically improved for a time. Douglass readily observed how city slaves were almost like freemen compared to plantation slaves.<sup>81</sup> His new owner’s wife, Sophia Auld, treated him with kindness and considered Douglass more as her equal than a servant.<sup>82</sup> She invested in his education by teaching him to read, thereby providing “the pathway from slavery to freedom”<sup>83</sup> and ultimately influencing his future as a leader of the abolitionist movement. When Mr. Auld learned about Douglass’s reading lessons, he forbade Mrs. Auld to continue further instruction because he believed “it would forever unfit him to be a slave.”<sup>84</sup> Douglass writes:

From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I the least expected it. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served

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<sup>79</sup> Vollinger, telephone interview, April 22, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 16.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-20.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both.<sup>85</sup>

Mrs. Auld's instruction lay the foundation for Douglass's education while Mr. Auld's resistance to her teaching enlightened Douglass of the power and freedom that could come from learning to read. Vollinger retells Douglass's story in the song's text:

[Exposition] Whoa *All men are created equal*. As a slave boy Frederick Douglass had to eat cornmeal like a pig from a trough. *All men are created equal*. He had one shirt, no blanket, and he'd get whipped if he didn't obey fast enough. *All men are created equal*. But then his new owner's wife, Sophia, treated him like a child instead of a pig. *All men are created equal*. She said, "thank you." She also let him look her in the eye. *All men are created equal*. [Climax] She even taught young Frederick how to read. *All men are created equal*. [Resolution] Sophia's husband was angry with her for doing this. *All men are created equal*. He said that slaves who learned to read were no longer fit to be slaves. *All men are created equal*.<sup>86</sup>

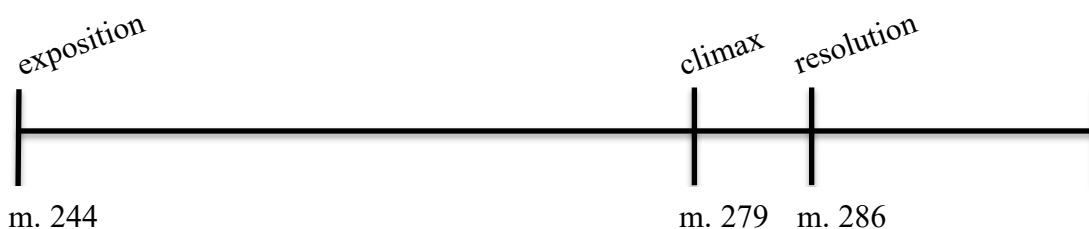
Dividing the story's text using Freytag's Pyramid, the exposition details background information about the injustice Douglass experienced as a plantation slave prior to serving the Auld family. When Douglass meets his new mistress, Mrs. Auld, he unexpectedly witnesses her humane treatment, particularly in the time she spent teaching him to read, which denotes the climax based on the pivotal role this knowledge afforded him. As a result, in the resolution, Mr. Auld scolds his wife insisting she cease Douglass' reading instruction because, according to his firm belief, educating slaves would make them unfit to be slaves.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> William Vollinger, "Freedom Begun," 2005; printed on "Acts of Kindness," accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).

**Figure 6.5. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Freedom Begun"**



The recurrence of the text “all men are created equal” functions as a refrain in “Freedom Begun” and suggests the prevalence of call and response textures found in African diasporic songs like field hollers and coordinated work songs. In Douglass’s autobiography, he comments on the significance of these songs to slaves:

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery.<sup>87</sup>

One could view the refrain of “Freedom Begun” as the chorus of a slave song serving to provide the slaves encouragement through hope that they might someday be viewed as equal. At the beginning of the exposition, the *fortissimo* vocal exclamation that enters on G5 and immediately ascends to C6 on “whoa” (Ex. 6.17, mm. 248-249), captures the audience’s attention and compels them to listen to the oft-repeated phrase, “all men are created equal.” Each time the statement occurs, except the final iteration, a stepwise ascending vocal melody crescendoing from *piano* to *forte* accompanies the text, suggesting a longing for these words to manifest into reality. In contrast, the

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<sup>87</sup> Douglass, 9.

accompaniment contains a descending melodic contour referencing the blues with the stock progression G, F, E-flat, D (Ex. 6.17, m. 250) like in “Hit the Road Jack.”

**Example 6.17. “Freedom Begun” mm. 248-250. *Fortissimo* vocal entrance on G5 immediately ascends to C6 mm. 248-249 in exposition. Stepwise ascending vocal melody crescendoing *piano* to *forte* contrasts descending melodic contour in accompaniment with G, F, E-flat, D progression m. 250.**

The image displays a musical score for Example 6.17, "Freedom Begun" mm. 248-250. The score is written in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins at measure 248 with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and a descending melodic contour. The lyrics "Whoa..." are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a descending melodic contour in the bass register, contrasting with the vocal line. The lyrics "All men are cre-ated e-gual." are written below the piano line. The score is marked with dynamics *ff*, *p*, and *f*.

As the exposition continues and the text details Douglass’s cruel treatment, the vocal melody and accompaniment emphasize the brutality of Douglass’s plantation master through fragmented and disjunct phrases, accent marks, and a fairly dense chordal texture in the accompaniment with octaves low in the piano’s register at a *forte* dynamic. Short, disjunct melodic phrases of approximately one to two bars in length reflect the aggressiveness of Douglass’s treatment through abrupt leaps of octave intervals (Ex. 6.18, m. 255 and Ex. 6.19, m. 263), a descending tritone (Ex. 6.18, m. 256), and accent marks over descending arpeggios underlined with bass notes in the lowest two octaves of the piano (Ex. 6.19, mm. 261-262). The accent marks paired with the text “and he’d get whipped,” “didn’t obey,” and “fast enough” call to mind the violent lashes from Douglass’s whippings (Ex. 6.19, mm. 261-263).



**Example 6.18. “Freedom Begun” mm. 255-256. Disjunct melodic vocal phrase mm. 255-256 with octave leaps m. 255 and descending tritone m. 256 in exposition. Fairly dense chordal texture in accompaniment with octaves low in piano’s register.**

255  
had to eat corn - meal like a  
256  
pig from a trough. —

**Example 6.19. “Freedom Begun” mm. 260-263. Disjunct melodic vocal phrases mm. 261-263 in exposition. Accent marks over descending arpeggios in voice underlined with bass notes in lowest two octaves of piano mm. 261-262. Ascending octave leap to accented G5 m. 263.**

260  
blan - ket,  
and he'd get whipped if — he did - n't o - bey fast — e - nough.

In Douglass’s autobiography, he describes Mrs. Auld’s voice like that “of tranquil music.”<sup>88</sup> The accompaniment of the climax echoes Mrs. Auld’s gentle, calming tone as she teaches Douglass to read. The lilting arpeggiated line in the treble clef, set in the mid-range of the piano, paired with single notes in the bass clef, create a thin texture and overall tranquil mood (Ex. 6.20, mm. 279-282). In contrast to the flowing melodic line of the accompaniment, the vocal line is comprised entirely of repeated G4 pitches set close to a spoken range with dotted half-note rhythms, except the octave leap on “read” at the

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 19.

end of the climax (Ex. 6.20, mm. 279-284). The repeated pitches, devoid of vocal inflection, combined with the slower rhythmic motion seem to imitate Douglass gradually sounding out words as he first learned to read. The ascending G major scale in m. 283 of the accompaniment paired with the ascending octave vocal leap G4 to G5 in m. 284 at a *forte* dynamic point to Douglass’s excitement about his progress learning to read (Ex. 6.20).

**Example 6.20. “Freedom Begun” mm. 279-284. Thin texture in accompaniment with lilting arpeggiated line in treble clef, set in mid-range of piano, paired with single notes in bass clef mm. 279-282 in climax. Repeated G4 pitches and slow rhythmic motion with dotted half-notes in vocal line mm. 279-283. Ascending G major scale in accompaniment m. 283. Ascending octave vocal leap G4 to G5 at *forte* m. 284.**

The aggressive quality of the exposition returns in the resolution as Mr. Auld abrasively rebukes his wife for educating Douglass. Vollinger depicts Mr. Auld’s sternness through fragmented vocal phrases reminiscent of verbal outbursts, accent marks, *forte* dynamics, and a denser accompaniment texture with bass notes low in the piano’s register. Accented low notes in the piano on repeated C2 pitches at a *forte* dynamic immediately precede the mention of Sophia’s husband being angry with her (Ex. 6.21, m. 286). An abrupt ascending minor 7th leap in the vocal line to “angry” followed by a quadruplet rhythm (inaccurately notated as a quarter-note quadruplet, intended to be an eighth-note quadruplet) together emphasize the text by changing the division of the beat (Ex. 6.21, mm. 287-288). The off-beat accents in the accompaniment against the

strong beat accents in the vocal melody on “doing this”—referring to Mrs. Auld teaching Douglass to read—suggest Mrs. Auld’s startled reaction to her husband’s verbal outbursts (Ex. 6.21, mm. 289-290).

**Example 6.21. “Freedom Begun” mm. 285-290. Accented low notes in piano on repeated C2 pitches at *forte* dynamic m. 286 in resolution. Abrupt ascending minor 7th leap in vocal line to F5 followed by quadruplet rhythm mm. 287-288. Off-beat accents in accompaniment against strong beat accents in vocal melody mm. 289-290.**

The image shows a musical score for Example 6.21, "Freedom Begun" mm. 285-290. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 285 with the lyrics "All men are cre-a-ted e-qual." and continues with "So-phi-a's hus-band was ang-ry with her for do-ing this." The piano accompaniment features repeated C2 pitches in the bass line. Red boxes highlight specific musical features: a quadruplet in the vocal line at mm. 287-288, a quadruplet in the piano accompaniment at mm. 287-288, and a quadruplet in the piano accompaniment at mm. 289-290. Dynamics include p, f, and mf.

The resolution closes with one last iteration of the refrain text in Ex. 6.22, m. 299, but this time Vollinger alters his setting of “all men are created equal,” musically emphasizing unity through pitch and equality through rhythm. The repeated G4 pitches in the vocal melody, quadruplet rhythms equally distributing syllables of the text, and a single G major chord in the accompaniment contrast previous refrain settings that employ a stepwise ascending melodic line, repetitions of quarter and eighth-note rhythms, and a descending melodic contour in the accompaniment. The final setting of the refrain leaves little doubt regarding the true message of Vollinger’s text setting: all men are created equal. “Freedom Begun” ends harmonically unresolved with a  $V^{4/2}/iv$  chord (Ex. 6.22, m. 302) that concludes the song’s short postlude and implies the ongoing need to address prejudices and issues of inequality still present in our society.

**Example 6.22. “Freedom Begun” mm. 299-302. Repeated G4 pitches with quadruplet rhythms in vocal melody and single G major chord in accompaniment m. 299 in resolution. Postlude ends harmonically unresolved on  $V^{4/2}/iv$  m. 302.**

299 *p* 4 4

All men are cre - a - ted e - qual.

*p* *f*

8th - - - - - 15 -

### “First Sacrifice”

Vollinger encountered the story that inspired “First Sacrifice” on the internet. The text tells of a young Palestinian woman so consumed by anger toward the Israelis for the death of her brother that she volunteers to be a suicide bomber out of a desire to seek revenge. She mindlessly follows the training of her superiors in preparation for the fatal attack, but when the day arrives to carry out the mission, she observes Israeli families together and realizes she would be taking human lives. Instead, she sacrifices her freedom by turning herself over to the authorities. The story of the Palestinian woman’s sacrifice follows in the song’s text:

[Exposition] After her brother was killed in an Israeli raid, a young Palestinian woman volunteered to be a suicide bomber. All they taught her was how to hide explosives on her body and when to push the button. The day came that she would go to some Israeli city with another bomber. It was a bright sunny day, and all of the people looked so happy, and parents walked with their children, and some of them were playing. [Climax] She thought to herself, “But they taught me as a child that it wasn’t right to take another person’s life.” [Resolution] She turned herself over to the Israeli police. The other man only blew up himself.<sup>89</sup>

Comparing the text with Freytag’s Pyramid, the exposition states how the death of the Palestinian woman’s brother provokes her to volunteer as a suicide bomber and alludes to the rote, desensitizing method of training<sup>90</sup> she received in order to follow through with the mission. When the time comes for the Palestinian woman and another bomber to attack an Israeli city, the scene of happy Israeli families together causes the woman to question the mission as she humanizes those she intended to hate. The climactic moment arrives when the woman recalls the moral teachings from her childhood and her conscience motivates her decision to spare the Israeli people’s lives.

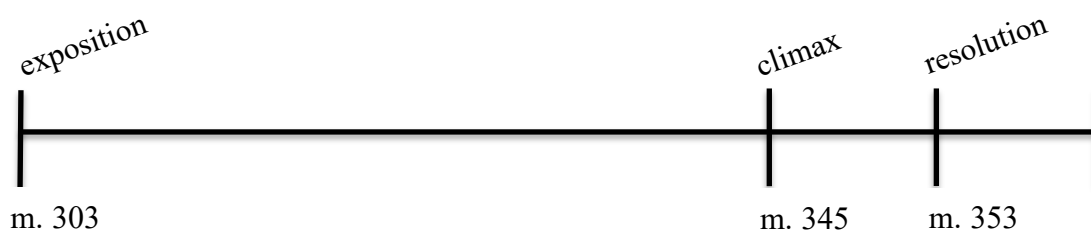
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<sup>89</sup> William Vollinger, “First Sacrifice,” 2005; printed on “Acts of Kindness,” accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).

<sup>90</sup> Debra D. Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, 2004), 10.

Her change of heart leads to the resolution where she turns herself over to the police and the story reveals what happened to the other bomber: he only sacrificed himself for the intended mission.

**Figure 6.6. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "First Sacrifice"**



In the exposition, the designated “piercing” vocal quality, *forte* to *fortissimo* dynamics, and pitch and rhythmic repetition in the vocal melody and accompaniment foreground the Palestinian woman’s driving rage toward the Israelis. The opening vocal phrase characterizes the woman’s anger through its *forte* entrance, indicated “piercing” tone, pitch repetition on C5, intermittent accent marks, and persistent eighth-note rhythms (Ex. 6.23, mm. 309-312). Throughout much of the exposition, the accompaniment contains constantly repeating C4 pitches transferred between the left and right hand of the piano paired with a recurrent rhythmic pattern where durations gradually accelerate from whole to half to quarter to eighth notes (Ex. 6.23, mm. 309-314) suggesting an increasing intensity in the Palestinian woman’s anger.

**Example 6.23. “First Sacrifice” mm. 309-316. Opening vocal phrase enters at *forte* with indicated “piercing” tone, pitch repetition on C5, intermittent accent marks, and persistent eighth-note rhythms mm. 309-312 in exposition. Constantly repeating C4 pitches in accompaniment transferred between left and right hand of piano paired with recurrent rhythmic pattern gradually accelerating in duration from whole to half to quarter to eighth notes mm. 309-314. Rhythmic pattern restarts in m. 315.**

309 *f* with a piercing voice (>) (>) (>)  
 Af - ter her bro-ther was killed in an Is - rae - li raid,  
 8<sup>va</sup>-----, 1

313 (>) (>) (>)  
 a young Pa - le - stin-i - an wo - man vol-un-teered to be a  
 8<sup>va</sup>-----, 1

The Palestinian woman’s observation of the Israeli people’s happiness and revelation that her mission would result in the death of innocent lives causes her to ponder the ethics of her planned attack in the climax. She quietly withdraws deep into her recollection with a *piano* dynamic and descending steps from F4 to C4 in the voice and right hand of the piano, separated by rests between words suggesting time spent recalling the moral teachings of her childhood (Ex. 6.24, mm. 345-348).

**Example 6.24. “First Sacrifice” mm. 345-348. *Piano* dynamic with descending steps F4 to C4 in voice and right hand of piano, separated by rests between words mm. 345-348 in climax.**

345 *p* She thought to her - self, "But *f*

In the one-measure piano interlude in Ex. 6.25, m. 352, Vollinger employs bimodality by overlaying G major and F minor harmonies evidenced by the right hand of the piano ending on a G-natural with B-natural and A-natural pitches in the melodic fragment and the left hand playing a F minor chord. This harmonically ambiguous measure that lies between the stated moral in the climax and the Palestinian woman's decision to withdraw from the mission in the resolution alludes to the inherent tension of her moral dilemma.

**Example 6.25. “First Sacrifice” mm. 350-352. Bimodality in overlapping G major and F minor harmonies in piano interlude between climax and resolution m. 352.**

350 child that it was -n't right to take a - no - ther per - son's life." *mp*

For the resolution, Vollinger pairs a variation of the opening melodic phrase from the exposition with the text reporting how the Palestinian woman chose to turn herself over to the Israeli authorities. The variations applied in the resolution include a truncated



melody creating a blunt delivery of the account and altered rhythms with interspersed rests in the phrase punctuating the text (Ex. 6.26).

**Example 6.26. “First Sacrifice” mm. 353-356. Variation of opening melodic phrase from exposition in resolution with truncated melody, altered rhythms (dotted half-note starts the phrase instead of a quarter-note m. 353, added sixteenth-note triplet m. 355), and interspersed rests m. 354.**

353 *mf* She turned her-self o-ver to the Is-rae-li po-lice. (*>*)

*mf*

8<sup>th</sup>

The resolution continues as the singer reports the outcome of the other bomber’s attack primarily through text spoken in rhythm while the accompaniment augments the drama of the story’s conclusion. Vollinger indicates a “mechanical” delivery of the spoken line possibly referring to the other bomber’s rote and emotionally detached way of preceding with his attack. The moments of silence in the accompaniment under the spoken text contrasted with a *forte* C8 pitch at the start of the phrase (m. 357) and the *fortississimo* interjected chords written at the extremes of the piano (m. 358) elicit tension and unpredictability (Ex. 6.27). The tension resolves when the piano softly plays the final cadence with the sung text “himself” (Ex. 6.27, mm. 359-360) as the story reveals the relieving news that the male bomber failed his mission by only sacrificing his life.

**Example 6.27. “First Sacrifice” mm. 357-360. Indicated “mechanical” delivery of text spoken in rhythm mm. 357-359 in resolution. *Forte* C8 pitch in accompaniment m. 357. *Fortississimo* interjected chords at extremes of piano m. 358. Piano softly plays final cadence with sung text mm. 359-360.**

357 SPOKEN: *mechanical* 3 *mf* *mp* *attaca*

The o - ther man on - ly blew up him - self.

15<sup>ma</sup> 8<sup>va</sup> 8<sup>vb</sup>

*f* *fff* *p*

### “Second Sacrifice”

As Vollinger searched for true stories to set in *Acts of Kindness*, he approached his student teacher asking if she knew any stories recounting kind acts from her Korean heritage. The story she told, about a Korean baby girl adopted by missionaries in Kangwon province, inspired the text for “Second Sacrifice.” As the adopted girl enters adolescence, she begins questioning why her birth parents abandoned her. Her adoptive parents explain how they rescued her as a baby from the arms of her mother who they found frozen to death. The girl’s birth mother evidently sacrificed her life to save her baby by taking off her clothes to wrap around her child. After learning about her past, the girl visits her mother’s grave and lays her own clothes across the grave as a symbolic gesture of gratitude for her mother’s sacrifice. The song’s text reveals the love of the girl’s adoptive parents and birth mother:

[Exposition] A Korean girl was adopted by missionaries. As a teenager she had an identity crisis, thinking her parents had abandoned her. One day they told her, “In Kangwon province when the enemy left, a baby was heard crying. Under a bridge they found a woman frozen to death, clutching her crying baby in her arms. The woman had taken off her clothes and wrapped her baby in them. [Climax] You were that baby.” [Resolution] They went to her mother’s grave. The girl put her own clothes on the grave and said, “Mother! You must have been cold.”<sup>91</sup>

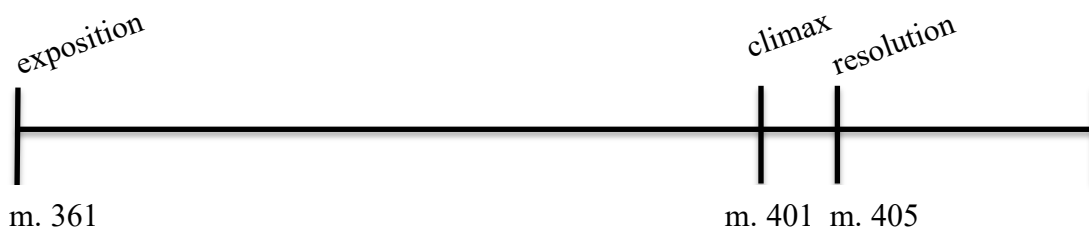
Aligning the text with Freytag’s diagram, the exposition establishes the premise for the story about an adopted Korean girl who experiences an identity crisis assuming her birth parents abandoned her, which motivates her adoptive parents to elucidate her past. The climactic moment occurs when the adoptive parents reveal to their daughter that she is the baby they rescued from the arms of her mother found frozen to death under a

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<sup>91</sup> William Vollinger, “Second Sacrifice,” 2005; printed on “Acts of Kindness,” accessed March 5, 2021, [http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts\\_of\\_Kindness.html](http://www.williamvollinger.com/Acts_of_Kindness.html).

bridge. After learning about her birth mother's selfless sacrifice, resolution comes for the girl when she visits her mother's grave and no longer doubts her mother's love.

**Figure 6.7. Freytag's Structural Divisions for "Second Sacrifice"**



Throughout "Second Sacrifice," Vollinger musically references the child's Korean heritage with his inclusion of style features specific to "Arirang," a popular type of Korean folk song characterized by a pentatonic melody, triple meter, and the improvisatory nature of melodic embellishments.<sup>92</sup> To harmonically align with the B-flat major pentatonic scale employed in the song, Vollinger substitutes three chords of the original chaconne progression. The original chaconne modifies from  $i-V^6-V^{4/2}/IV-IV^6-V^{6/5}/V-i^{6/4}-V$  to  $I-I-vi-I^{6/4}-V^7/V-I^6-V$  with omitted chordal thirds in the  $V/V$  chord and  $V$  chord to maintain pentatonicism by avoiding scale degree 4 and scale degree 7 respectively. Example 6.28 shows the modified chaconne progression found in the final song of the cycle.

<sup>92</sup>Hyunjin Park, "Korean Arirang: History, Genres, and Adaptations in Edward Niedermaier's 'Arirang Variations'" (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2011), 14-28, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://repository.asu.edu>; E. Taylor Atkins, "The Dual Career of 'Arirang': The Korean Resistance Anthem That Became a Japanese Pop Hit," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (August 2007): 651, *JSTOR*, accessed January 19, 2021.

**Example 6.28. “Second Sacrifice” mm. 361-368. Modified chaconne progression in exposition mm. 362-368.**

**7. SECOND SACRIFICE**

♩ = 84  
with a gentle "Arirang" feeling

361 *p*

A Ko - re - an girl \_\_\_\_\_ was a - dop - ted by mis - sion - a - ries.

*p to the end*

366

As a teen - a - ger \_\_\_\_\_ she had an \_\_\_\_\_

The vocal melody in the exposition reinforces the drama of the girl’s adoption story through range, intervallic leaps, and dynamics. The unexpected entrance of the *forte* G5 pitch at the beginning of the phrase in m. 381—an interval a perfect 12th higher than where the previous phrase ends—implies the missionaries’ shock of hearing a baby crying under a bridge (Ex. 6.29).

**Example 6.29. “Second Sacrifice” mm. 378-383. Unexpected entrance of *forte* G5 pitch at beginning of vocal phrase m. 381, a perfect 12th higher than previous phrase ending m. 380 in exposition.**

As the missionaries find the baby’s mother frozen to death, their shock conceivably turns to sorrow, expressed vocally with a softer *mezzo piano* dynamic on a descending minor 7th interval followed by low, monotone C4 pitches perhaps representing their feelings of emptiness upon witnessing the scene (Ex. 6.30, mm. 387-389). In the succeeding phrase, Vollinger highlights the mother’s desperate desire to protect her baby by building intensity through an ascending melodic line that crescendos to *forte* twice leaping to G5 through intervals of a perfect 4th then a major 9th (Ex. 6.30, mm. 390-392).

**Example 6.30. “Second Sacrifice” mm. 387-393. Descending minor 7th interval to low, repeated C4 pitches at *mezzo piano* in vocal melody mm. 387-389 in exposition. Ascending melodic phrase crescendos to *forte* twice leaping to G5 through intervals of a perfect 4th then major 9th mm. 390-392.**

In the climax, when the girl learns she is the baby in her parents’ story, Vollinger composes a dramatic, melodically unprepared, exposed vocal line on a *forte*, B-flat5

sustained for six beats over a sparse accompaniment texture (Ex. 6.31, mm. 401-403).

This loud, high vocal phrase that emerges unprepared from the soft, sparse piano texture evokes a sense of exuberance and relief the adoptive parents likely experienced finally revealing to their daughter her story and her mother’s heartfelt love.

**Example 6.31. “Second Sacrifice” mm. 401-404. Melodically unprepared, exposed vocal line on *forte*, B-flat5 sustained for six beats over sparse accompaniment texture mm. 401-403 in climax.**

The image shows a musical score for Example 6.31. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, and the bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins at measure 401 with a forte dynamic marking (*f*). The first note is a sustained B-flat5, which is highlighted by a red box. The lyrics under the vocal line are "You were that ba-by." The piano accompaniment consists of a dotted half-note in the bass line, followed by a half-note, and then a quarter-note.

The vocal melody at the beginning of the resolution reflects the adopted girl’s acquired sense of security and freedom in knowing the depth of her birth mother’s love through selfless sacrifice. It lies securely in a narrow octave range with mostly stepwise motion and smaller intervallic leaps, while the melodic turning figures—imitating vocal embellishments characteristic of the improvisatory style of “Arirang”—imply freedom (Ex. 6.32, m. 408 and m. 412). In the final part of the resolution when the girl speaks to her mother for the first time, passion emanates through her words as the phrase ascends, crescendoing to G5 on “Mother!” then tenderly falls, decrescendoing to F4 as she expresses gratitude through recognition of her mother’s sacrifice (Ex. 6.32, mm. 413-418). Additionally, the variation in accompaniment texture to blocked chords and slower rhythmic motion, with a dotted half-note in place of two eighth-notes and a half-note, accentuates the girl’s words as the faster, quarter-note motion in the vocal line paired

with the arched melodic phrase heightens her text. In the last seven measures of “Second Sacrifice,” Vollinger seems to unify the entire cycle through his implementation of blocked chords—referencing the previous accompaniment texture used in the opening song, “Bridge and Roses”—and by harmonically breaking from the pentatonic scale to reinstate the original chaconne progression (Ex. 6.32, mm. 412-418).

**Example 6.32. “Second Sacrifice” mm. 407-418. Vocal melody lies in narrow octave range with mostly stepwise motion and smaller intervallic leaps mm. 407-412 in resolution. Melodic turning figures in vocal melody m. 408 and m. 412. Arched melodic phrase crescendos to G5 then decrescendos to F4 mm. 413-418. Accompaniment texture changes to blocked chords and slower rhythmic motion with dotted half-notes in place of two eighth-notes and a half-note mm. 412-418. Original chaconne progression returns mm. 412-418.**

407

mo - ther's grave. \_\_\_\_\_ The girl \_\_\_\_\_ put her own clothes on the

412

*a piacere* *f* *p*

grave. \_\_\_\_\_ and said, "Mo-ther! You must have been cold." \_\_\_\_\_

*a piacere*

(bring out)

The score consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 407-411) shows the vocal melody in a narrow range with mostly stepwise motion. A red box highlights the melodic phrase in m. 408. The piano accompaniment features blocked chords. The second system (mm. 412-418) shows the vocal melody with dynamic markings *a piacere*, *f*, and *p*. A red box highlights the melodic phrase in m. 412. The piano accompaniment features blocked chords and a slower rhythmic motion with dotted half-notes. A red box highlights the piano accompaniment in m. 412.



## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION

The art songs of William Vollinger, as well as the interesting stories he converted into song texts, offer a compelling case study for narrative form analysis: examining prose song texts with a linear narrative, through the lens of a narrative structure like Freytag's Pyramid to help inform the analysis of a composer's musical setting. Through these songs, Vollinger features the real-life stories of ordinary people in an attempt to make his music more relatable. Further, his penchant for setting stories of profound morality offer hope and inspiration to audiences through themes of adoption, heartfelt love, truthfulness, kind acts, selflessness, equality, and sacrifice.

Although I cannot claim Freytag's Pyramid is a faultless model for considering these songs, as evidenced by the omission of structural divisions in Vollinger's song texts or the implementation of a truncated model for the shorter song texts of *Acts of Kindness*, it still provided a useful tool for exploring and charting the dramatic arc of each song's narrative. The structural divisions I discovered based on Freytag's model helped direct my attention to the most intriguing musical elements of melody, harmony, and accompaniment in Vollinger's compositions which I then highlighted in my analysis. When I first began analyzing the song texts, I endeavored to delineate all seven structural divisions but was surprised by the omission of certain divisions. For example, "Benalisa" lacks a resolution while "Alice," "First Journey," and "Second Journey" end after their climax. These inconclusive stories invite the listener to contemplate a more satisfying ending or, in the case of the true stories, research what transpires next. Additionally, I expected to find more moral messages overtly written in the texts since Vollinger

composes with that agenda in mind; however, only “Benalisa” contains a dénouement. So in the case of these songs, Vollinger primarily leaves the listeners to intuit the underlying message.

Throughout *Acts of Kindness*, the structure of the texts, viewed through my condensed version of Freytag’s model, arguably unify the song cycle more so than the chaconne. In virtually every song, Vollinger spends over half the song on exposition text material while the climax, and resolution if present, arrive close to the song’s end. Each lengthy exposition builds to the story’s climactic moment by relaying pertinent information unveiling the significance of the climax. Thus, Vollinger consistently discloses the “act of kindness” for each song in the conclusive section comprised of the climax/resolution.

I hope the songs of “Benalisa,” “Alice,” “Ruth,” “Daddy Verne,” and the song cycle, *Acts of Kindness*, their stories about ordinary people, and their moral messages will be a source of inspiration for those who encounter them: to love others deeply, act out of kindness and selflessness, and sacrifice freely.

## APPENDIX A

## TRANSCRIPTIONS OF INTERVIEWS

**APRIL 22, 2016**

Katie Mersch: Hi. It's nice to talk to you. Nice to meet you.

William Vollinger: Yes and likewise. Tell me something about yourself. Could you do that for a minute?

KM: (I told Vollinger a little about my education at St. Olaf College and University of Nebraska-Lincoln.)

WV: I attend an ELCA Lutheran church and St. Olaf is ELCA. Do you have a denomination affiliation?

KM: Yes. My home church in Kansas City is Evangelical Presbyterian.

WV: I see. Jesus is one church. That's something I feel very strongly about. The things we agree on are Jesus, particularly: I'm a sinner, I need help, Jesus died for me, He rose again, I believe that I'll go to heaven, and then to grow in a relationship with God. People that are Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant of all varieties all have experienced that. I have, I guess, in many respects, a Pentecostal way of looking at things also. But it's all one church; it's His church. He started it, I didn't, and if we spent less time fighting with each other, it would be really good.

KM: I'll go ahead and start off by asking you a few questions. I see you went to Manhattan School of Music for all of your degrees, is that correct?

WV: Yes, they're all from there.

KM: Can you talk about some of the most influential people in your life, specifically for composition, who have guided you along your journey as a musician?

WV: Well, let's see. There are people I admire and respect very much as composers. When I was 18, I became an agnostic. Not wanting to be one. I loved God as a little boy, and particularly music; music made me feel closer to God. But then I was sitting at a piano and I thought, "How do I know there's a God?" No, it wasn't. I thought, "What would it be like if I didn't believe there was a God, no heaven or anything?" And suddenly I had this horrible feeling like "I don't know" and it was like the opposite of being born again. It was a terrible feeling, a horrible feeling, and I spent many years looking to find evidence for God. Then when I was 29 and my wife was 27, we went to a woman named Kathryn Kuhlman who had healing services and was very extraordinary. We had a friend who was very sick, so that year, several things in a strange way planted us much closer to God than we had been. We had a new birth experience at her service. So when I was in college, I had not experienced that and I was very much in my own ego,

and pride, and underlying pride is fear. You feel like you don't have an identity and then if you're famous, you'll amount to something. I'm not the only musician who is like that. I think you would know. But you've probably met several [people like that] and generally it comes out as arrogance, but it also comes out in hesitancy to do anything. So when I was a student, my teachers, they were ok. One was a good one. Her name was Ludmila Ulehla. She was the only one without much of a reputation, I suppose, but she was a good teacher. The other people were certainly very fine composers, but I don't think they were great teachers. I was not respectful inwardly of them and wanted to do things my way. A particular idea I had as a young man and still have is, and my wife will put it this way, she said, "You would insult Bill more if you said, 'I like your music. It reminded me of Stravinsky.' As compared to, 'I didn't like your music. I've never heard anything like that before.'" I've actually had a couple times people say that, in that kind of tone, like, "I've never heard anything like that before." Not like, "that's nice." So my main goal was to be different than any other music I heard. When I was 21, I wrote *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs* and when I started to do that, I intended to write fifty. And I said to myself, "By the end of this process, I will have arrived at some new things that I haven't done before." And I did. My music particularly deals with new ways of using words. The devices that I have besides monody itself,<sup>93</sup> which is an interesting thing, is having speaking and singing alternating. So in notating that, the words would not have rhythmic values that are spoken, only the pitched ones would. That tends to accentuate the important words so it brings them out more. That was one device, alternating speaking and singing. That's a problem if you have three instruments or even a piano with you and somebody else is playing the piano that's not you. If I'm playing the piano and doing it, I can do that, fine. But timing of it, it can be done. So that's a device I used to use a lot. Another device would be to indicate sometimes pitches but not rhythms. That also would tend to be not with other instruments. Then a third one is to have, which you wouldn't have in *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs* but in a large amount of my music now, is that the spoken part is written rhythmically. Then the instruments, or in some cases, voices duplicate the rhythms of the speech but they're supplying the pitches. They're not completely confined to that, but they often are. So those are devices that I developed. There are three types of writing vocal music. At least a friend of mine said this. His name is Frank Felice. He teaches at Butler University. He's a good composer and a great guy. There is some music where the words are really not important at all. Then there's the kind where they're kind of equal of value, which a lot of music is like that. Then there's some where the words are very important, and I'm in that category. So if I want to write a nice tune, I sometimes will write the music first and not do words because that will take over the music for me so much it will be recitative more than aria. I tend to write a lot of recitativo stuff. People like Monteverdi, Verdi, Benjamin Britten, Mahler would be also I guess, are very preoccupied with the words; that the music conveys what the words are saying a lot. And so, I'm in that kind of way of thinking. But the other ways of thinking, they're ok too. That's what other people choose to do. So those fifty songs I sent you, they were an exploration of new territory. At the time, I would have said I was looking to be original, and original is impossible because we're using a sound system that we didn't create. My favorite quote on the arts is four words by the choreographer George Balanchine, who choreographed virtually everything Stravinsky ever did, except the

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<sup>93</sup> Vollinger uses the term "monody" to mean unaccompanied voice.

*Symphony of Psalms*, in which he says, “God creates, I arrange.” And that is correct. So it’s really, “exploring new territory” is a better phrase than “originality.” Means you’re trying to find out some other things. There’s a quote, and I’m paraphrasing it now, of Michelangelo, which is, “no artist can judge another artist’s work because he’d do it differently.” So when I listen to somebody else’s music I really have to, in many respects, reserve judgment, even if a part of me doesn’t at all want to reserve judgment. When music sounds alike, a lot of it, I don’t get too excited. If I hear music like something I’ve never heard before, that makes me very excited. At the last conference I was at a few months ago with a lot of compositions and composers, I heard a lot of music for orchestra and concert band for instance. I remember hearing the first piece and thought, “That’s really interesting. I like that.” And then the second one, “I like that too.” Then it’s the third or fourth one you think, “Wait a minute, they’re all sounding like each other. It’s like the same style.” I mean I wasn’t used to this particular style. So an issue for me also would be that I want my music not to be current, I would like it to be new. I’d like to explore new territory, not just reproduce what people are already doing. I don’t know if I can inflict that on every other composer and make them want to do that, but for me, that’s a significant thing that I like doing, and I think that’s fine to do that so I’m not apologetic about that either.

KM: I had gathered that text was very important to you. So when you are setting texts, when you’re in the beginning stages of deciding how to set texts, how do you decide if you’re going to use the vocalist, as a singer, as a narrator, whether you’re going to set them with accompaniment or *a cappella*? What is your process for deciding those things?

WV: Well, it depends on the subject—usually I’ll have a subject matter, in fact I’ll always have a subject matter—of what is the piece going to be. I have one orchestral piece of I-IV-V-I I did two years ago, which did not have any words and is a one chord, a four chord, a five chord, a one chord. It’s built on that. But even that, that was the idea of the piece. So I have to have what it’s going to be about, Stalin and that little girl holding a bouquet of flowers or this is going to be a set or series of true stories of people doing kind acts, some of them small, some of them big, of very different kinds of people. You know, that’s *Acts of Kindness*, which you’re familiar with because that’s what you initially mentioned. So there’s usually an idea...or a piece about growing up in New Jersey or... but very often I do my own words. Sometimes not. And so, in the case of this English poet, Jenny Joseph, who is best known for a poem which begins with these words, “When I’m old, I will wear purple and a red hat which doesn’t suit me.” That poem led to something which is called the Red Hat Society. So she started that and that is not a typical poem of hers. A typical poem of hers is more metaphysical, [a] philosophical thing. I met her about fifteen years ago at a music festival in New York State. I had never heard of her, but people said she’s a well-known poet. Then she heard some of my music and she liked it, so she asked me to write five musical things that she would then put words to, which is not usually how it’s done. [Incidentally], the Gershwin brothers did that, by the way. George Gershwin wrote music and then Ira would write the words. So something like, “I’ve got rhythm, I’ve got music, I’ve got my gal.” I’ve heard different versions of that. He came up with different words before he came up with that. So at any rate, I’ve done a lot of her poems. There was a particular poem about four or five years

ago, I was going to... There's a choral group called the Gregg Smith Singers. If you were in your 60s or older, you would know their name if you're in classical music. Maybe 50s. Your age, maybe not. Gregg Smith did a lot of music of Charles Ives, recording it. Also Stravinsky [and] a lot of contemporary music. An extremely fine conductor. He's still alive and I still see him occasionally. For his last concert with his group about four years ago, I intended to write Jenny Joseph's last poem in her last book. She's still alive also. I was driving in the car, and I had a series of recordings come up on my iPod, all of which were related to... I was going to Gregg Smith's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday actually. So I was driving up a several hour trip and all these things were like connected to him or people I was going to see. Then one of her poems, which she was reading, came up and it wasn't the poem I was going to do. The poem was called "The Torrent." When I heard her reading it, it was a very strong impression, "that's what I'm supposed to set to music" and so I did. And in that case, the piece that I came up with is a narration entirely. But actually, the recording is Gregg Smith's wife, whose name is Rosalind Rees, and then four voices—madrigal quartet. I originally wanted it to be choir, but it didn't work out. Now if you're a mystical Christian you'd accept this. I've only had one vision in my life. The day that piece was performed I saw a woman, and it was in a room in my house and she's wearing like a gown, and she pointed at me and said, "This is the best piece you've ever written." So I consider that the best piece I've ever written. I've had numerous coincidences with that piece, like having a dream that a choral group in California was going to do "The Torrent." Then I woke up later and thought I dreamt that they did that so I wrote the conductor an email saying, "Would you like to do this piece, 'The Torrent'?" So I sent it and she answered me right back and said, "We don't do anything with piano in it." So I prayed and said, "Jesus, you could change this around. You could make something good out of this." So I continued to open emails after reading her response, "We couldn't do it." And it was from this organization, National Society of Composers Incorporated (SCI), that they had chosen "The Torrent" to do at the conference. So that was kind of like my dream, but it was just the wrong group from the night before. Another one was getting the piece recorded. I had music done on my 69<sup>th</sup> birthday, two years ago, in Ohio. I was corresponding with a singer who was organizing recording "The Torrent" and it wasn't coming off. I was getting a little frustrated, not very, but a little about it. I wrote an email to her saying, "What can we do about this? Can we speed it up?" I sent the email and went downstairs to sit by the Miami River in Ohio by the hotel. Then I noticed, immediately after I sent the email actually, I saw this very modern looking statue, looked like glass and metal. I walked over to it and in paint the name of the statue was "Torrent." And then there's one other one, when the piece was first rehearsed, [at] the first rehearsal my thought was, "This piece is just crazy. It just sounds like a mess. What did I write?" Then I'm sitting waiting for my bus in New York and there's a kid wearing a t-shirt. He walks by, and I forget what's on the front of his t-shirt, but I said to myself, "When he walks past me, the back of his t-shirt is going to say something about what I'm feeling right now." Well, the back of the t-shirt said, "It's not bad, it's just different." So those are experiences with that piece. Other pieces I've written, I have not had experiences like that. They don't sometimes always feel like an impression to write something or do something, but this was like very strange. Another piece of mine, which is called "Raspberry Man," about a guy who sticks his tongue out at people that walk by Jack Dempsey's Broadway Restaurant 40-50 years ago, that probably

gets the most response for any piece I wrote for an audience. It's funny and it's touching. It's very good. I wrote the words myself. But "The Torrent" was the one I feel like a higher power was saying, "No this is..." Of course, that piece ["The Torrent"] is, by the way, about agape love. The poet is not a believer. She would be agnostic at best, Jenny Joseph. To her, it's about a life force. If you listen to that piece, the first part in the poem is a description of this cavernous place where you can't breathe, and there's steam, and it's dark, and you can see a bit of light up at the top of this enclosure you're in or something, and eventually that trickles down to become a river. In the second part, the poet is going to town. For no reason, the sky is all blue except for one little wisp of a cloud. Then he sees these two little minor events. One is a grubby English woman getting off a bus and a well-dressed Jamaican young man chasing after her, and she's a little apprehensive, and he says, "Ma'am, your scarf. You left it on the bus. I was trying to get your attention." She said, "Oh how kind of you. Thank you so much." They smile at each other as he crosses the street again to get another bus and their eyes meet. The second nice act, this is like *Acts of Kindness* I guess, is an old couple walking to the chemist, you know, the drug store. He [the poet] can see [the man's] trying to hold his wife's arm, which he always would do, and she's also holding his arm because she needs to help him. They manage to get in the chemist and the door slams. It doesn't slam in the poet's face, but he thinks it might have, so he's, "Oh, dreadfully, stupid of me. Forgive me." [The poet says,] "No, no, no, it's nothing." So from those two little events, it's like, to me, that poem, that's God. Like when God says to Moses, "I'll put you in the cleft of the rock. No one can look at my face and live. You can see my hind parts as they go by." To Jenny Joseph, it's a Dylan Thomas poem, "The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower." It's a metaphor on a life force but it gets reduced to very simple kind acts. The week I finished writing the piece, I encountered a book by a man who turned out later I thought was a Christian, who's a psychiatrist, on the subject of a hormone called oxytocin which is called "the helper's high," which is released when you do a kind act for somebody else. So in a way, that's what that piece is about. Can I talk about *Acts of Kindness*?

KM: Yes, I would love to.

WV: Ok *Acts of Kindness*. I have a good friend, Raymond Beegle, who is a very fine musician. He teaches at Manhattan School of Music. He wasn't teaching when I went there. He had an idea for me to write a piece about kind acts. Let's see, the first of those is a man who's a pastor. He's having a hard time. He had a hard time in his church he was in at the time. He wasn't going to commit suicide by the way, but he's looking down at the river and he saw a rose garden down by the riverbank built beneath him. He thought to himself, "That's so beautiful. That's so nice." So he walked down and knocked on the door and said, "I've seen your rose garden. It's such a pretty thing." The guy said, "You know why I put that up do you?" [Rev.] Olsen said, "No." He [the man] said, "Well somebody jumped off that bridge so I wanted to put that there so next time if somebody thought of that, they'd see the pretty roses and they wouldn't jump." So that was the story I heard from this pastor. The second one is something I found on the internet about a little girl, I think with a different name. I call her Kayla. And the boy tore off her beads. She's in kindergarten. And she starts crying. And another girl gives up her

beads, which are, I think, nicer looking, if I remember the story correctly, than her beads. And they become friends. Then the third one is about a Jewish guy, and that's a true story. Raymond told me that story. Where, "Of course you can have some tomatoes," the German woman said. The fourth one, also Raymond told me about that, which is about Mandelstam, who is a Russian poet. I hadn't heard of him. He wrote a poem that made fun of Stalin, and the result was, he died. His wife tried to escape, and you read that. The shoemaker in Russian literature is often a representative of God or an angel. The shoemaker says, "You'll never go without shoes again." Then the fifth one is of course Frederick Douglass. That [story] I think Raymond told me about also, [but it's] from [Frederick Douglass'] book *Up from Slavery* [*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*] in which he describes this woman [who] actually taught him to read from the Bible. The sixth one is based on a melody I had a recording of [that] I encountered, of a Palestinian song. So the woman that is going to blow herself up because her brother was killed and then changes her mind. Then the last one, which is the one that usually makes people cry, is a pentatonic one about a Korean girl who's an orphan. That story, a Korean singer told me that one. So I assembled all those together and made them as a passacaglia, [in this case] a harmonic progression of seven chords [for] seven songs and they keep repeating. Each one is different than the others. So like the one about Frederick Douglass sounds kind of like ragtime-ish or blues. Another one sounds child-like like the one about the little girl. The very first one, there's a piano part there that's really easy. It's all whole-note chords. That's to state the progression that's going to be heard in all the songs. That piece is one of my most conservative sounding ones. It's lovely. When it premiered the first time at a composers' conference in Texas, I remember feeling like "I don't feel like this belongs here. It's too old fashion." I've also written songs for contests. One time I was at one where I thought my music was so way out compared to the other music. So I've had both sides of that, like it doesn't fit. But that is a very good piece that's being done in June of this summer in California.

KM: You said you write a lot of your own texts. Has it been self-taught on how to write texts and does it seem to come natural for you?

WV: When I was in college, I was not satisfied with the music I was composing for a couple years at all. For the first couple years, I was not happy with it. Felt like I didn't have a voice. I didn't know what I wanted to write. I would write a lot of poetry and read tons of poetry. Hence those poems in that collection I sent you [*Fifty Unaccompanied Songs*]. So at that time, I was very well read on modern poetry. A lot of that poetry, I would want to read it all. Some of it I would. Some of it you can respect. So that made me write with words a lot. But I used to have a feeling I had nothing to write about and it was only after becoming a Christian that I had something to write about. Particularly to write about how wonderful Jesus is, which He is. He's so wonderful. But Jesus sees people. The idea of witnessing to me is, more, you care about the person, and if you start talking about God, that's good. Usually if I'm talking to a person I care about, I really have to start talking about God. But occasionally I don't. One time I was at a restaurant. We had a waiter. He just gave me the impression that he was very smart, and I kept asking him questions. I'd say, "What do you do besides waitering?" "Well, I do computer work." "Oh, ok. Are you good at that?" "Yes." And I kept feeling, no, there's something



else. “Do you do anything else?” He said, “Well, I write poetry.” I said, “You do? You write poetry? What do you do with the poetry?” “Well, I don’t really...I used to write poetry. I’ve really gotten away from it. I have a friend that tells me I should go to his organization.” I said, “You should write poetry. That would be great.” Then my wife and I left the restaurant. It was outdoors. And before he would know that, and now, I’m not a millionaire, I left a \$100 tip for him and I didn’t say anything. I thought that will impress him maybe to do that. But in that case, I believe that was God in my heart. I know it was because it was like some sort of leading, but I said nothing about God. But usually, I will have to bring Him in. But Jesus’ focus, when you read the Gospels, He talks to the Samaritan woman at the well, which is such a great story and has so many ramifications. There is a beautiful drawing by Rembrandt, an engraving, if you want to look it up, “The Woman at the Well.” You see Jesus with his foot up on the well looking at this woman and smiling at her. When Rembrandt draws people, he makes them look ordinary. She looks very worldly. Her expression like, “Oh yeah. I could use some of that living water. I wouldn’t have to come to a well. That’d be great.” He says at first, “If you knew who you were talking to, you would ask me for living water. I’d give it to you.” She says, “Oh yeah, I could really use living water.” Rembrandt’s engraving captures that expression. It’s perfect. He’s smiling at her, and Jesus says then, “Call your husband.” Then there’s a silence I think, and she says, “I don’t have a husband.” “Well, you’ve had five husbands. The guy you have now is not your husband. You’re speaking the truth.” So he’s actually affirming her, very gentle. He knows about her. She said, “You’re a prophet. Well, you Jews worship in the temple, but we worship at Mount Gerizim.” He says, “Woman, salvation is from the Jews, but the time will come when you will not be worshipping either the temple or at the mountain. God is Spirit and those who worship God, will worship in Spirit and in Truth.” Then she just runs off, tells her Samaritan friends, except I don’t know how many she had because she would go to the well at the time of day when nobody was there. Then they come and listen to Him, and they said, “We hear for ourselves who this man is.” But when He’s sitting there and the disciples come back and said, “Master, you’ve got to eat something. You haven’t eaten. You’ve got to take care of yourself. Come on, Jesus.” He says, “Hey, I have food you don’t know about.” That I think is oxytocin by the way. It’s like, “When I talk to this woman, I don’t need to have a sandwich. You know. It’s fish and bread. This is food for me.” When He says to the woman from adultery, first He says, “Neither do I condemn you.” Then second of all He says, “Go and sin no more.” First, He starts up with, “You’re not condemned. You’re forgiven.” But then, He says, “But there’s an empowerment to that, go and sin no more.” It’s like when He says to the paralytic, “Son, your sins be forgiven” when he goes to get lowered through the roof. I wrote a piece of music about that actually. It’s in *Inner Voices*. That might have been Jesus’ own house in Capernaum because it says, “When He was in His house, in His home.” Some people get, “Oh Jesus didn’t have a home. He’d always use rocks as pillows.” My opinion would be, no, He’d have a house, you know. But at any rate, first says, “Your sins are forgiven.” They say to each other, “Who does He think He is forgiving sins.” You know, whatever the words are. Then He says, “To show you that the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins, I say to you, get up, pick up your bed, and walk.” Those words are so powerful, and they have all kinds of other meanings, because in that case, we’re all paralyzed in sin and the things that are wrong in us. There’s something wrong with human nature. It’s broken. One hundred percent of us

are broken. We're born that way. It isn't like if we tried to act better we'll improve. No, we don't improve. We've been old natured. It doesn't improve. We have a new nature in Jesus, which is His, which is perfect, and the old nature is always there. You can't cast out the old nature. You have to keep getting drawn to Jesus and the good nature. If it sounds like I've done all this, I haven't. I have a battle every day. It's hard for me. I have things in my life I'm not talking to you about, which I've had to overcome in my life, which are serious issues. But for me, those words, "rise, get up" is such a powerful thing. And then, "pick up your bed." In other words, don't lie there in your bed. You know, the things we lie down in and go, "I can't." And then, "walk." It's such a great thing. But everything about Jesus is empowering you. Everything about it is to make you be who you were meant to be. When I was first a Christian I was at a bible class. I said to my bible class, "For Jesus to be in this planet it must have been like being in a snake pit. It's just so evil." Immediately I heard like in my heart, I didn't hear out loud a voice saying, "No! That is not what it was like for Jesus to be with people because when Jesus looked at people, He saw who they could be." It was like, okay, that sounds like a good answer, and that's true. So Jesus looks at anyone. We all are valued. We all have importance. If you're an atheist, He loves you. I have a friend who's an atheist and he's very mad at God for different reasons. He had very serious cancer. His name is Ron and he's a singer. Once he told me how as he'd fall asleep, he'd think about other people who are as bad off as him and think kind thoughts. I said to him, "Ron, that's God. God is love." I had a bumper sticker once that I had made. It was on an old car that said, "God loves atheists," because He does. God is love. And atheist, that's a category. Another piece I have written, which I didn't send you, a key line in that is, "People see categories. God sees people." An atheist, gay, a drunk, a Presbyterian, a conservative, a liberal, whatever, somebody who's shy, somebody who never shuts up and talks too much, all those categories, those are categories, and God sees us as individual people. He would never refer to somebody in your church as, you know, that drunk. He wouldn't demean the person. At the same time, Jesus, because He's a friend of sinners, He hates sin. Sin He hates. Sinners He loves.

KM: What I was first drawn to was, like I told you, *Acts of Kindness* and these little story vignettes. I really like how you take little stories, whether it's from scripture, scripturally based, or just individual stories and build on that. It reminds me of one of my favorite pastors actually. He's left our church in Kansas City and moved out to Colorado, but he always had a way of starting a story in his sermon, then preaching the gospel, and then wrapping it up at the end by telling the rest of his story. I am so enthralled with stories. I think that's such a neat way, like you said, to connect with people and have that be your mission field, your connection to people in that way.

WV: I'm not always loving but I love people. Sometimes I'll say, "People are better than planets." You know, planets, like Neptune is awesomely blue and big, a bowl of gas. It's astounding. It's wonderful but it's not as good as a person. Every person has a story. So my son-in-law, if you go on Facebook and you type in "Portraits of the Jersey Shore," you will come to my son-in-law, Gregory, who is in many ways similar to me. My older daughter, Mary, married someone who's similar to her father. Not in all respects but in a lot of respects. When I was a child, I was extremely shy. I would avoid eye contact.

Gregory is gregarious. So two years ago, someone anonymously gave him a very nice camera. He now knows who the people were. They saw him taking pictures with his iPhone or whatever he had. He started to take pictures. First, it was of nature scenes, which are very remarkable. Then he started to do people on the Jersey Shore because they lived on the Jersey Shore. He'll say, "Can I ask you a couple questions about your life?" Usually things like, "What was an important moment in your life?" or "What's a difficult time in your life?" and he'll take pictures of them. He captures something. It's truly supernatural in some of their faces. These stories are extraordinary. Some of them are very sad, some of them are very happy. They're all a variety of things. So a project I'm now going to be involved with more is setting some of those transcripts because he'll record what they say, then the photos will be shown as you hear the music and the person's story. But again, that's seeing people. So I'm very much drawn to stories about people as opposed to an opera in three acts with a plot. But I also like narratives. Narratives are a kind of music which tell a story, but the person is narrating it. I don't know if you remember something called "pansori," which is a Korean kind of...it's not an opera. It's a singer, usually a woman, holding a fan with a very guttural voice, sometimes speaking, sometimes singing, and she'll tell a story. Then there's a guy with his kind of 1600s Korean looking hat playing a two headed drum as he tells the story and encouraging her to tell the story. I teach World Music: Music of Diverse Cultures, something I'm not trained in which I've learned some stuff about. That in particular, I was like, "Woah, this is like what I do." It has a moral of the story. I've only seen one actually, about a good brother and a bad brother. But it's the same kind of thing. Do you know who Corrie ten Boom was? Do you know that name?

KM: That name sounds familiar but I'm not sure.

WV: She's a Dutch woman. She and her family hid, during World War II, the Jews from the Nazis. They all died. She's the only one that survived. I think maybe one other brother survived. I wrote a piece of music, it's my second longest piece I've ever written, and it was recorded many years ago, twenty years ago. It's called, "More than Conquerors." It's her life story. Unfortunately, it's for a baritone, it is not for a soprano, but it's a clarinet and piano. It's the whole story of her life. I wrote it the year after I became a committed Christian. My wife and one other guy I know, Raymond Beagle actually, they kind of consider that my best piece. But again, it's people. So, yes, I'm very drawn to write about people and usually my music is not explicitly Christian or liturgical unless I'm writing at the church. Then that's a different thing. But if it's for a concert hall, I'm trying to reach people where they are. I don't want to hit them over the head with the gospel. Even though either side of that approach is dangerous because it's the self on either side. It's either the self that makes you afraid to say something about somebody who'd change your life and is more alive anyway. On the other hand, one would argue with somebody because they don't believe and prove to them there's a God. Both of those don't work because both of them are fear driven. When you get angry, before you're angry, you're afraid for a second. You're even threatened. So fear is the opposite of love. Perfect love casts out fear. That's why the approach of avoiding talking about Jesus because you don't want to offend anyone... Sometimes you need to be

offended, and sometimes people that get offended, they come around. They're getting convicted. So sometimes you do have to get hit right in the face.

KM: We talked a little bit about your interest in possibly publishing more of your art songs.

WV: I would love to have anything published I wrote. It's hard to get it published. It's something that's worth sending stuff out and that's all I can do. In the case of solo vocal music, if you write a choral piece, for one performance it's going to be thirty copies, maybe more. If it's a solo voice piece, it's going to be one copy. So that means a publisher, who is not a charitable institution and trying to survive. People that do art music, there's a very small audience for that. So therefore, they're not going to be very quick to publish that. I have one set of five songs, which are very good, for unaccompanied voice, called *unaccompanied people*. The guy so liked the music, he published it. Then a couple choral pieces, which have sold, I'm telling you the truth, no copies so far. Oh, there were a few [copies sold]; I bought them. They were accepted to be published. I have music that I've written for school, some music in the [J. W.] Pepper catalogue, which were editors' choices, so they sold. I didn't make a fortune but actually that got performed way more than any classical music I write. Another piece of mine, which is one of my five best I think, is the "Child in the Hole," which is for soprano and clarinet. It's based on a true story of a guy who was in the hole for three years, in the ground during the Holocaust. It's my imaginary version of what his life must have been like. It has a double meaning because he's waiting for his father to come and he's also waiting for God the Father to come. The first word in the Hebrew dictionary is "father/aleph." "Aleph, bet" those are the first two letters. I only realized it when I was writing the piece. I actually even refer to in the piece how the little boy can't read Hebrew, but he can sound out the letters "aleph, bet" which spells father. I hadn't thought that when I was writing the piece. The woman that premiered that piece, she's done a lot of my music, her name is Linda Ferreira. Of the recordings I sent you, the one that's called *Sound Portraits*, she is on that, and that is the closing selection. She was on a vacation in Southeast Asia with some other Americans I think, mostly or all entirely, and she met this guy from Chicago who is a successful businessman who's Jewish. He proceeded one night to tell the story of his childhood, which was being in a hole in the Holy Ground. So that became the piece. Another very good piece of mine is "Stalin and the Little Girl." That is for a baritone. It would be nice if it were a bass sounding voice. When that piece is done, it very much affects the audience. It's horrible; it's an awful piece. It's about hell really. You can write about evil without being evil. Jesus descended into hell in the Apostles' Creed; therefore, He defeated hell from the inside out because He ascended to the right hand of the Father. So those are particularly pieces that are very well received when people hear them. They go over particularly well. Others not so well. So the publication thing is, sure, if I can get someone to publish it, that's great. I should do more to try to get music performed and published and I tend to not do that enough. I tend not to do that because my flesh gets in the way and I'm afraid of rejection and failure. All the other composers I know personally, are the same way, with a few exceptions.

KM: I don't know exactly how publication works. If you were to put a group of songs together into a collection, would that be more likely to be published? Do you have a vision for what you would group together if that were an option?

WV: If you want to pray for me, you can pray that I have more courage in sending music out to people, but also wisdom in terms of who do I sent it to. So if I write a piece, for instance, I'm actually looking very often more for performances. It's easier to contact a singer, a soloist for me, or an instrumentalist than a choir or an orchestra because they will have a website and they'll have a webmaster so to make a contact is harder to do. But if I don't knock on a door, how can I expect it to open? Sometimes God does open the door without me knocking. Even you doing this, I didn't contact you. I have had people contact me who have found my music on the internet. But on the other hand, it is something I really need to do. But not to do for myself to impress people or draw my identity from that, but because it's to be productive, "I've written this and it should be heard." I'm very convinced that the music I write has value and people should perform it. That's not ego, it's just, "It should be heard more."

KM: Are you familiar with Classical Vocal Reprints?

WV: No, I'm not. Tell me about it.

KM: (I told Vollinger about the CVR website.) Actually Mark Hijleh's name is listed on their home page under "Top American Composers featured on this website" and I know he's in The Christian Fellowship of Art Music Composers organization.

WV: Yes, he started our organization. Mark Hijleh is a wonderful musician by the way, and he had this vision to start an organization of Christian classical composers or art composers. For a number of years, he was the one that ran it. So you went to our CFAMC website to look for Christian composers? Is that what you had in mind?

KM: My original idea for my research was finding a composer who had written art songs set to sacred texts of some kind. So in my search in that area, I came across your organization and just started going down the list of names and checking out everyone's website.

WV: So did you hear *Acts of Kindness*? You went to my website and heard that piece?

KM: Yes.

WV: So again, if you're looking for sacred texts, I mean I do have another one of my unaccompanied soprano pieces, *Songs of the 3 Miriams*. That unaccompanied soprano can be done in any key; therefore, unless you have perfect pitch and you'd go crazy. So again, as I said, inwardly I'm a Christian when I'm writing, but outwardly I'm not always writing in a liturgical setting. Haydn's my favorite composer. His music is very good and happy. But before I was a Christian, my favorite composer was Mahler. Stravinsky I love,

and Charles Ives, but I also like very much Bach, also Handel. I tend to like often Baroque and Classical Period. Later Romantic, not too much. I like Fauré very much.

KM: I have one more question for you and then I'm sure I will think of many other questions as I continue. I saw on your list of works on your website that you also have *217 Small Songs*. What is that? Is that a collection?

WV: For several years, I wrote songs for piano and voice, little miniature things to keep composing after I graduated from college. In a way, most of the performances of my music have been in this century. I have a few things in the preceding one. So those are a whole bunch of different songs. In order to have copies of that, I would have to go to a copy machine and find some of them. Many years ago, some of them I arranged for a few instruments and two voices, and it was on the radio in New York. Again, because I'm now a Christian, I'd have to think about even what they're about. Some of them I definitely would not know. I would not want them done. But some of them, maybe. It would depend. I wanted to write about something, but I had nothing to write about.

KM: These [*217 Small Songs*] were written before your *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs*?

WV: No, they were after that. *Fifty Unaccompanied Songs* would be in 1966 when I turned 21. My father, this is way back, he made copies, had them bound, so I still have three or four left. I'll send you one. The others are just the originals written in ink. I did copy them over in ink. I could look through them if you would like me to do that. But since you're doing soprano, again there are several soprano [pieces], the *unaccompanied people*, "Child in the Hole" and the *Songs of the 3 Miriams*, those are certainly a few that would be in that category.

KM: You also have "Alice," "Ruth," and "Daddy Verne."

WV: If you were ever interested in emailing Linda Ferreira or speaking to her on the phone, she's done a lot of my music over a period of years. It might be interesting to do that. She's a soprano. She's in her 70s. Those three songs, the one about "Ruth," which is a woman who roomed in her parents' house, is boring to me. I did actually revise it but it's still boring. How I listen to a student's music is, I'll listen to the music and I'll say, "Okay, let me hear that again," usually, "Let me hear it a third time." Then I'll start saying, "Let's talk about this now. This part works. This is good. Or another part, this is boring." Particularly I'll always say, "Our sworn enemy is the b-word 'boring.'" Of course, it's subjective. I'll say, "What can you do to change this to make it more interesting? You tell me." But then they'll do things like, "Well, the reason I did it is because I had this idea in mind." Well, in the case of "Ruth," that's what I did with that, "The first part's going to be unaccompanied, and the second part is going to be one chord like an oom-pah-oom-pah keep repeating and not changing." So that was the idea but it's boring. It doesn't work well. Now if it worked, to my ears at least, then good. The piece I wrote about Stalin, I intended to have a piano, and just as I stuck the [piano in], "No, he's in hell. He's in isolation." Instead of something with unaccompanied voice, what's amazing about that piece [*unaccompanied people*] particularly is, it's one unaccompanied

voice and it's very powerful. That can have that effect without an orchestra blaring away, like a very great work of Arnold Schoenberg, which is called *A Survivor from Warsaw*, about the Holocaust. Great piece of music and it has an orchestra in it. *Acts of Kindness* I always wanted to use piano. "Child in the Hole" was going to be piano, clarinet, and voice. It was going to be three instruments. I wrote it a ways with piano and thought, "I think I don't want to have a piano underneath." Two lines are very effective. Unaccompanied is effective, although it gets boring, it's true. But two lines is a different effect also. It works in a certain kind of way. I sent you a lot of music. I think I sent you everything pretty much that's soprano other than those *217 Songs*.

KM: The *217 Songs* is for piano and voice, right?

WV: Yes, it could be any voice. It's kind of mid-range. It would have been my voice so to speak. I would be often singing when I'm composing. There is another piece for soprano, which is a really good piece. It's for orchestra and soprano. It's called *Betty Sings 3 Holy Nights*. I sent you a score. I paid a soprano to sing it but with an electronic orchestra background from my computer. It's a story of a girl at the age of 12, the age of, I don't know, 29, and the age of 50, singing "O Holy Night" on three very different occasions. That's an interesting piece. It's actually virtually the first piece I wrote on the computer. I could hear an orchestra and it is amazing. If you're Mozart, you can do it. A lot of people can do it actually, I'm sure. But for me, it would be, if you were a painter, and you only had a pencil and a piece of white paper, and you drew the painting, and you wrote in "light blue turning to darker blue green," and you have arrows indicating all these colors, and then you stood back and looked at the picture you'd go, "I don't know what that looks like." So I could write things for solo voice and piano, that's true. But if it starts getting to be an orchestra, I could not hear that. But suddenly I have color. So it's a very dramatic change in composition.

KM: Well, thank you so much.

WV: Also, you can be objective writing about me. You're writing about my music so if you have critical things or any observations, you are free to write that even if I didn't like it. Just do it anyway. Seriously that's very important. It's important to be objective. Courtesy is not the same as kindness.

### **DECEMBER 13, 2016**

KM: There are a couple other questions I want to ask you regarding some of the things we talked about last Thursday [December 8, 2016]. I couldn't remember if you mentioned where you found the text for "Second Sacrifice" in *Acts of Kindness*.

WV: Oh, I think I know who it was. It was a lady who was practice teaching to get a license to teach music. She already had a doctorate in organ and piano, but she was going for another degree. I asked her, I think it was her, if she knew of any stories that would be touching, like an act of kindness from Korea. So that was the story she told. At least, I believe that's the case. I certainly didn't find it on the internet.

KM: So it's somebody you knew from where did you say?

WV: From when I taught elementary/middle school in Westchester and it was a lady who was practice teaching with me. I asked her about that then, if she knew any stories that would be on the theme [of kind acts], specifically from Korea since she's Korean.

KM: You mentioned "Benalisa" was intended to be played with one hand. Do you have a reason for choosing that?

WV: Well obviously it doesn't make any difference to hear it. I guess it would matter a little to see it. It would have a theatrical effect. But the idea was to make it confined, the accompaniment, that it couldn't get like "Alice." That's the hardest, I think, piano thing by the way. That's all over the place. So I wanted something very simple and child-like. And as I already said to you, that song ["Benalisa"] was written three times. I don't have the other two versions, maybe I do in a folder somewhere. It's just before I had a computer. So I wasn't happy with them and I literally got on my knees and prayed. I said, "God help me to write music that fits this." Then that version came up which I felt was exactly what I was supposed to write. I was like, "This is the way it's supposed to be." Now, you know the origin of the song is from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Not the St. Olaf's branch, not ELCA. We had a vacation bible school and that was in 1988. Or was it 1992? It could be either one because I got a computer in 1993. Might have been in 1992. It would say that on the music. But at vacation bible school, our mission project was Lutheran Church Missouri Synod World Relief. So that was in a flyer they had for the children to look at and [Benalisa's story] was the text. So I took the text from that because the text was written for children to understand also. [Vollinger looked up the PDF of "Benalisa."] I have copyright 1996. I didn't write it that late. It probably was 1992 that I actually wrote it. I have a letter that I wrote to Lutheran Church Mission Synod getting permission to use it. Of course, I had permission for [the text] and I said if I made any money from that, it would go to them. But I of course made no money from that.

KM: So did you just misprint the copyright on the music or was 1992 the first version?

WV: 1992 was when I wrote it. I'm sure of that because in those days, I would make a cassette tape of the songs from vacation bible school and a lady in our church sang it.

KM: It was this version? The version you have printed?

WV: I think so. I don't know if I did any slight editing, but it would be pretty much so. But to go back to the one hand thing, that was to confine myself musically to something simpler. So there couldn't be a lot of notes in it. I wanted it to be very simple, to have a feeling of simplicity. Of course, for that piece, it is very touching when it talks about sitting on her grandmother's lap and then the wonderful news that she's adopted, which also in the Bible, adoption is a very frequent point. We are all adopted. Actually, you're doing two songs about adopted children ["Benalisa" and "Second Sacrifice"]. God gives us life and therefore, the idea of adoption means we all need to be adopted. It's always



strange when kids are adopted if it bothers them. And some it doesn't, but a lot it does. The argument would be, "Well, you were chosen." But it's a difficult thing. We want to know we belong and we have parents. In both of those stories, in the one case, it was just a little girl [who] now had a family you don't get to find out about. The other one, it was a missionary who adopted a Korean girl and then when they finally told her the story—she knew she was adopted—of course, you know the words, "Mother! You must have been very cold." So that relates to the idea of adoption.

KM: I had asked you to think a little bit about your childhood regarding your influences or whatever you're willing to share specifically related to music.

WV: I wouldn't share everything with you. I had a very unhealthy childhood, but I won't explain that or go into that. When I was 7 years old, there was a kid down the street, his name was Johnny, and his mother brought him to this new church that was starting. This was 1952. It would meet in Paramus, New Jersey where I grew up. So I started to go to Sunday school and the pastor of the church was a young man who was like my hero growing up. My mother had a nervous breakdown. She had been an organist. She had a lot of emotional problems. He would come to visit her and my dad and me. Sometimes he would also talk to me, and I think he saw how there were things in me that were a problem. So he was a Godly influence and a male role model, which I really needed. At any rate, he took a call to be a teacher at a Lutheran Mission Synod seminary in Missouri. He had a ruptured appendix and he died at the age of 35 leaving two little children and his wife. They went through very difficult times. I know the children now. His wife died a few years ago. So one of the things he did very much was he liked music very much. When my mother was an organist for about a year, that she could handle, (I'm an organist and music director in my church now for 16 years) they would practice a piece by Sir John Stainer, which is *The Crucifixion*. There's a very beautiful chorus in Stainer's *Crucifixion*, "God So Loved the World." So that piece affected me. Also we had some 78 records in those days and one of them was *A Little Church Around the Corner* and they were singing "Oh Savior Speak" which was a piece by Bach. At a young age, I liked music that made me feel closer to God or there was something spiritual about it, but particularly God. So as a little boy, I was attracted very much to God. When I was very little, I never thought about God and I remember when I was in kindergarten reading some Bible story thinking, "This is strange. I don't understand this." But by the time I was 10 years old or something, it wasn't strange, and I loved Jesus in my own way. When I was 9, my grandmother was bedridden and lived with us. My mother cared for her, which probably wasn't good for her. My mother was very attached to her mother. But we were able to sneak her into the county hospital to visit her. This is a significant anecdote, my mother explained to my grandmother that I would have my first piano lesson that Saturday. She had given us a piano with some remaining funds she had that she inherited, and we had the piano. So when my mother told my grandmother that, my grandmother said to me, "I'll be watching you from heaven." She died the next day. So that had an affect on me. Now this is very personal but it's a childish kind of personal story. I'm an only child and I'm very spoiled. My father, I didn't get along with. My mother was very attached to me and it was very unhealthy. They would give me every year a little Christmas tree. It was an alive tree and we'd put ornaments on it. It was in my room. We

had a bigger tree in the living room. So that was a big deal to me as a little child. Well when my grandma was in the hospital, (my parents didn't have a lot of money I guess, you know, we were okay) they gave her that tree that they always would get for me and I got like a branch from a Christmas tree and put a couple ornaments on that. I was angry at that and I was like, "This is an awful thing." I remember saying, "I hope my grandmother dies." I was mad at her that I didn't have that tree. Not nice. When my grandmother was dying, I remember praying by facing the East, and the sunlight was coming in—it was something like a sense of God's presence—and I asked God to forgive me for saying that. So those are a couple events in my life that contributed to me listening to music. If it was a single sense, it would be music that would move me, that would touch me spiritually is what I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear classical music especially religious music, music that would make me feel God's presence. So that was very important [and] going into high school that continued. Now I'm giving you a spiritual testimony, which I have to; it goes along with my life. When I was 18, I was sitting at the piano in our basement and I was going to be starting Manhattan School of Music very shortly thereafter. It might have been August. I had just graduated from high school. And I thought to myself, "What would it be like if I didn't believe in God and I didn't think there was a heaven? What would that be like?" When I thought that, I had this thought, "I don't know if there's a God. I don't know there's a heaven." It was a horrible, horrible feeling. It would be the opposite of a born again experience, which I had when I was 29. It was like the reverse, and it really was upsetting. And for 11 years, I kept looking for proof that heaven, God, spiritual things [existed]. I read up on parapsychology and some kind of mediums and things. I don't want to go too long into this either, but I was looking for God. Then in 1973/1974, my wife and I both...we were married by then, I met her, she was in our choir, she was an alto, I was a bass-baritone, whatever I am, and we were married...but all these things happened in a single year that pointed us to God. Before that happened, I had a dream when I was in high school that a plane went over our house three times, and the third time, it was a bowl of flames from the southwest. I became obsessed with that dream and I didn't want to be on a plane. I thought it maybe was prophetic. I was just building this up in my mind looking at it now. We were married but we weren't born again Christians then, and I said to Chalagne, "I think I want to go to a medium about this dream." Chalagne said to me, "I don't like mediums" and she picked up a Bible, handed it to me and said, "Here, open to a verse and point." So I did that and the verse I pointed to was, "And Saul died for consulting a medium." That really happened. Needless to say, I didn't go to a medium. One time I was on a plane about 12 years ago and I was a little afraid of going on a plane. It was maybe my third trip to the southwest. I was going to Oklahoma for a conference. I was on this plane and it seemed very overcrowded. It was a bad thunderstorm and I remember thinking, "Maybe this would have been the flight." It wasn't. The plane didn't crash. It was fine. But fear is a very terrible thing. A sentence I like about that is, "God is love and He uses faith. The devil is selfishness and he uses fear." He makes you focus on yourself, introspection, worry, feeling bad about yourself, pride, "I'm better than other people" and all that stuff. So as I said before, we went to a woman named Kathryn Kuhlman who had miracle services. We would see her on television. She'd have every weekend a show of people who had miraculous healings. Subsequently there was a man in our church, his daughter was in one of her books who was healed of very serious epilepsy. After one of the

meetings, she was healed. So we had a friend we wanted to bring to the meeting to have her prayed for. Well the friend backed out, but five or six of us went. We went to the meeting and at the end of it, Chalagne and I being Lutheran, we didn't know what an altar call was. I don't know if you know what an altar call is... It interests me that you went to Christian Fellowship of Art Music Composers, to the website, to find a composer to research. So what made you do that? Why did you do that? I don't mean me. I'm talking about why did you want a Christian composer?

KM: It was because I figured maybe a Christian composer would have set sacred texts and originally I was looking for sacred art song music.

WV: Which often doesn't occur because it's either liturgical music or it's...you know. So mine would fit that. My music is not liturgical but it is Christian, and you would suspect I'm Christian if you are a Christian hearing a lot of it. So to go back to my anecdote, there was an altar call. We didn't know what one was I guess. So people went up for prayer, a lot of people. It was an enormous crowd. It was a very otherworldly experience being there that time. She had us, Kathryn Kuhlman, repeat a prayer if we went forward. My wife said, "Why aren't the people all coming up?" not knowing it's only if you feel you're giving your life to Jesus. Then we went back home but the next morning when we woke up back in New Jersey, my wife and I, it was like something was different with us. My explanation would be that it was like I had been in a dark place looking at light, like looking at God, but now I was in a light place made of light even though I might be looking in the dark. My theology would be the following: I am a spirit with a mind in a body. My spirit was renewed on that day, although God was working in my life before that and since, but my mind was just about as screwed up as it was a week earlier. Just a little bit better, certainly. And that's a process because our thoughts, which are our memories, are the things that get us into trouble and/or make us better. So my life since then has been the renewing of my mind. I'm going through this in the last couple weeks watching a video series on detox of the mind by a Christian neurologist, not a psychologist, and it's excellent. It means identifying bad thoughts and replacing them with good ones. Her statement is, after 21 days your brain is renewed and toxic thoughts weaken, and after three cycles of that or so, they're gone. This is why sometimes you encounter people that used to be one way and now they're another, and they're for the better. So it's starting to be a very helpful thing for me right now. In some ways I'm a very deep spiritual person, that's the Holy Spirit in me, but then I can really fall down and be really messed up as well [on] alternating days or something like that. I'm being very frank here. Our minds need to be renewed and the Bible keeps saying that. A very significant verse is, "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." It's important to recognize our thoughts and our thinking. So I want to be able to, particularly in this area. Once I went for counseling after being a Christian and I kept a journal. This is now 25 years ago. I came up with a sentence that described how I felt, which is, "unless I'm famous, I don't exist." That is what I felt. It's a very unhealthy thought, an absurd thought, but that's an emotional thing inside me which is very strong. For me to promote my music is very difficult because I'm so focused on self and I'm very afraid. If I'm helping someone else with their music, I don't have that problem at all. But when it's me, it's very hard. I'm not the only one like that and I'm not the only Christian composer like that in the

organization which you looked up. A lot of us have that issue. Maybe a few of us don't, but a lot of us do. Your identity is not drawn from success, money, fame, any of those things. It's a gift from God. And from that comes, God will provide you with good things, you know, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." But when we make other things God...the first commandment [states], "Don't have any other gods before me." We can make fame a god. We can make gods that are horrible like, "I'm no good. I'm worthless." Those things become like gods. You know, really demonic things. God is love. He wants everyone to be saved, to be in heaven. Jesus is the incarnation of God. He is everything who He said He is and way more than you or I could fathom. So that is who I really am. Sometimes people say, "How could she be a Christian and do that?" My answer to that is, there's only one Christian. It's Jesus living in your heart. That is why Christians can do bad things because they have an open mind that isn't renewed in areas. God hasn't gotten hold of that, but God makes all things new. So now in my life, unlike early childhood, I'm not a little child anymore. I think emotionally, I was a little child for a long, long time, childish in my thinking. St. Paul said, "When I was an infant, I thought infantile. I acted infantile. Now that I'm a man, I've given up infantile ways." It's very important to grow up. A very unhealthy song in *Peter Pan* musical is, "I won't grow up." That is not healthy. Peter Pan gives a lot of vibes to me that are not good. It's not *The Lion King*; it's not *Pinocchio*. *Alice in Wonderland* also is another one I don't like, but now we're getting off the subject. Last thing I'm going to say on that subject is quote Ben Jonson about William Shakespeare. They were friends. He said about Shakespeare, "A providence provided him a marvelous phantasie but it also gives him the ability to control it." So that tells me, probably, that when he would be talking to William Shakespeare, William Shakespeare was off the wall, but His imagination was there. Other people I know in the arts, we're all strange. We have an imagination. We're not just strange; we also have strengths and weaknesses. So going back to music, music that moves me, that makes me feel closer to God, that's music I really love and enjoy. But at this stage of my life, I really appreciate any kind of music including music that I don't like.

KM: Were you raised in New Jersey?

WV: Yes. All my life I lived in New Jersey. My wife lived her whole life in New Jersey. All of our parents, except her father for a year or two lived in the Bronx I think. All in New Jersey. We are more Jersey than Bruce Springsteen or Walt Whitman. So we're very Jersey. And one of my pieces for band and narrator is called, *It Takes a Long Time to Grow Up in New Jersey*. It ends with, "You got a problem with that?"

KM: Do you mind if I include your parents' names in the paper?

WV: Not at all. Actually my name is a combination of everyone in my family except my paternal grandmother. My name is William Francis Joseph Vollinger. My father's name was William Arthur Vollinger and my mother was Frances Bertha Vollinger. Now one mystery about my name...my favorite composer is Haydn; I think I've told you that. I don't know if I told you this anecdote. A number of years ago when I taught elementary/middle school, more like 15 years ago I guess it was, I had pictures in the

hallway outside my room of great composers. One of them was a picture of Haydn. It was at lunchtime and no one was in the hallway. For some reason I put my hand on Haydn's face and I said, "God show me something I have in common with Haydn." Immediately when I prayed that this thought came in my mind, "Your middle names are the same as his first names." Then years later I thought, "Why did I pray that? It wasn't even my idea." God is the source of everything, not me. He's the vine, we're branches. So William Arthur is my father and my mother, Frances Bertha. Her maiden name was Konneke.

KM: So do you have two middle names or two first names?

WV: I have two middle names. It wasn't a baptism name like it was Catholic. They wanted I guess to include the whole family. I'm not sure.

KM: Your mother was a musician. Was your father as well?

WV: Yes, my mother was a cocktail pianist. She actually studied classical piano when she was younger. There was a radio station in our county where we lived in New Jersey around the early 1930s and she was on the station all the time. She would act, speak, sing, and before she met my father, her boyfriend was also on the same station. So she was a musician. Growing up I didn't like jazz or swing or things like that at all. I liked classical music and it's kind of like a rebellion almost against what your parents like, which is stupid. But at any rate, that's the kind of music she did. My father was not a musician. He worked for General Motors. He did like antiques. He was very interested in antiques and they had an antique store. In a certain way he had an aesthetic taste because he liked Colonial things, which is interesting because he liked the simplicity of that. When I was young, I was very much like my mother; as I get old, I get very much like my father. My father was a big mouth. He could tell you what he thought, so could I. But when I was little, I was very introverted and I didn't want to talk to people, very shy. Teaching college, I had a student this semester who reminds me of me. You have to pump him to get him to say anything and yet he's very smart. He knows what he's talking about. But I'm me. I'm not my mother or my father. I'm my own person. Paramus, New Jersey is where I grew up. We now live in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey for the past 46 years. Our daughters' personalities...my younger daughter, Sarah, is more like me; my older daughter, Mary Ann, is more like my wife, which is very cheerful and easy to get along with. My wife is a very healthy person I would say, and her upbringing was very healthy. She's been a very good wife to me and I thank God for her.

KM: You mentioned that you started music lessons at age 9, which was piano. Did you play any other instruments growing up or now?

WV: Regrettably no. You know, I wish I had taken clarinet or something when I was middle school age—they didn't call it middle school then—then I would have been in the band. That would have been really good. Maybe I shouldn't say regrettably. I didn't like to practice piano but I did like to compose. I was improvising. I liked to do that.

KM: Did you study music abroad at any time?

WV: No. Never.

KM: David Diamond who you mentioned is now deceased and Mario Davidovsky...

WV: ...and Nicolas Flagello and Ludmila Ulehla, those would be the four names of the composition teachers I had. Nicolas Flagello's brother was more well-known than him, Ezio Flagello; he was an opera singer. Ludmila, Russian name obviously, [and] of the four teachers, she had the least reputation. They're different skills. Let me put it this way, you can be a fantastic musician, like a fantastic composer, but not a good teacher. You can also be maybe a mediocre composer but a really good teacher. So my attitude, I'm going to say this about the school I work in now, if I went back in the time machine and I had a choice between Manhattan School of Music and Nyack Christian College, I would pick for me to study at Nyack College because the teachers there that I work with are wonderful. In a couple instances, even extraordinarily wonderful. Particularly because it's a Christian school, they really care about the students, maybe too much. Maybe we're too nurturing at times but that's a nice problem to have. But if I had teachers like them, including a teacher like me to be honest, I would have been great. So when I teach composition now...I'd like to talk about this. This is my approach to teaching composition because I'm an adjunct teaching composition at a college. I don't have a Ph.D. but I owe my job also to the Christian Fellowship of Art Music Composers website because the head of the department went on the website, saw I lived nearby, and listened to my music. He likes modern music; he liked particularly a piece I wrote called "The Child in the Hole," which is one of my best pieces, and offered me the job. When I started teaching composition, I was much more like writing out worksheets and trying to make them into "How do I teach composition? I have to do it this way." This year in my composition class, I have three students. None of them are composition majors, all of whom are very good at composing and could be composition majors. The one is a singer and pianist, but particularly a singer. The other two, they are outstanding guitar players. My approach now teaching composition is, there are three things that have revolutionized my teaching. One is the students themselves, some of them are really gifted students. Number two is an iPad. Every student has one now and so they have access to compose on a computer and they can create very good things. So that has really opened up the ability to compose. The other thing is me, because my attitude now is...I'll listen to their music and I will listen for things I don't like or like. I'll probably listen to the piece and not even say anything a couple times. And as you know I like to talk. So what I'm looking for is, "What are they trying? What are they doing?" If they're working in a different style, if it's not modern classical music, if it's some other thing, I want to help them in what they're creating, in whatever genre they're working in. Having taught World Music now for several years at Nyack, something I'm not trained to do but which I've learned stuff about privately, that has made me very tolerant of music that I would never have tolerated 20 years ago. The same rules of music, the basic ones apply to every kind of music. They're the same including form. This is my definition of form: it's a combination of repetition and contrast. That applies to Japanese music, to gospel music...you name it. It's the same thing. So my idea is to encourage them where they are and try to enter into their space, [into] what they're creating. Now if I have a private composition student who is officially a composition major, then I will say, "You're going

to have to write certain kinds of pieces here. You're going to have to do some that sound like Mozart or Haydn or Beethoven. You're going to be doing something 20<sup>th</sup> Century; it's going to be atonal." But I will also do with them, "If you like this other kind of music, if you want to do jazz and you play guitar, you're going to do some of that too. And on your recital, you're going to play guitar and you'll write some music for guitar, maybe with a trio. But then you're also going to have a piano sonata. That's going to be on there too." So they're getting a couple kind of things. For me, a very important thing for my students, although I can't make them do it, is I'm not happy if they write like me. I've had a couple that do that. I would like them to write like themselves. There's a quote I'm fond of, I don't think I've said this to you, I read it many, many years ago about Debussy when he was writing his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. He kept throwing out pages and pages of music from *Pelléas* saying, "This smells of Wagner." Now that doesn't just tell me that he hates Wagner because he's French and Wagner was German, and there's always that dynamic between French music and German music, but it also tells me he must have really, when he was very young, been enamored with Wagner. Because Wagner in that time period, especially in the 1880s or something, he impacted everything, unfortunately, in many cases, to be frank. So he was trying not to write like Wagner. He wanted to write like Debussy. So again, I have said to you already about my desire was...you insult me more if you said, "I like your piece. It reminded me of Stravinsky," than if you said, "I didn't like your piece. I'd never heard anything like that before. It's really weird. I don't know what to make of it." That I would like better. A lot of students I've had aren't like that. They're happy to write like Hindemith or like somebody else. They don't have this desire to explore new things. My attitude about teaching composition is, I think composition teachers should try to enter into what the student is doing and encourage them in their own direction. When you teach composition, the two extremes are bad. The one is, "Here give me the pencil. I'll write it instead of you. Do it this way." That isn't good unless you're giving them an exercise in a style and then you do that to the best of your ability. But then on the other extreme, you just kind of sit and go, "Oh, well..." and you don't really say, "Now wait a minute, I don't care for this." My last thing on teaching composition, this is my favorite sentence to say to composers is, "Our sworn enemy is boredom." When the music gets boring, you got to do something. So as I'm listening to the music, besides listening for, "That doesn't work or I don't care for that," and it's always in my opinion, I always recognize I could be wrong, but [I listen for] this is where I start feeling bored. So for example with the Linda Ferreira songs, "Ruth" I consider boring. Why do I consider it boring? What contributed to it being boring? I had a mindset in that piece, and it doesn't work. Do you know what causes the boredom in that piece in my opinion? What makes "Ruth" more boring than "Alice" or "Daddy Verne"?

KM: Well it starts *a cappella*. Is that what you're referring to?

WV: Yeah. It's unaccompanied voice. Now I have pieces like "Mary Magdalene at the Tomb" that is intense, or my Stalin piece—10 minutes of unaccompanied [voice]—it's not at all boring. But this one ["Ruth"], it's boring. Then I have that piano thing where the chord keeps repeating. I've done that in a couple pieces but it never works. I forget I want it to work. It's very good to be...oddly enough, it's named "Ruth." It's good to be

ruthless. I want to be ruthless about “Ruth” because objectively it’s boring. So you know, I’d have to re-write it to make it work. The story is wonderful and Linda Ferreira wrote those texts with me in mind. She knows my music very well, probably one of the best of any musician I know, one or two others; but she has more of an affinity for it so her texts are perfect for my style of telling a story. You take and you set the words, and then you repeat certain words again and again so that there are certain devices. In “Ruth,” well she does in all three [“Alice,” “Ruth,” and “Daddy Verne”], she wrote them very well for me to set the music. It’s exactly right. But in the case of “Ruth,” I had this concept that it was going to be monody [unaccompanied voice], and then it was going to be just repeated chords, and it doesn’t work. So when I have students, I’ll say, “This doesn’t work here. It’s boring.” They’ll say, “Well, the reason I’m doing this is because...” I’ll say, “I don’t care about... It’s boring. You need a new idea.” Again, in my opinion. Maybe I’m missing something, or I have a prejudice toward the piece or something. That’s always possible. But putting that aside, that doesn’t explain it. That explains how you construct it. To be honest, when I hear *The Art of Fugue* of Bach, his last piece except for a chorale prelude, which he didn’t finish, parts of it to me are boring. It’s so mathematically complex what’s he’s creating, but to listen to it, it’s not like his cantatas or the B-minor Mass or the *St. Matthew Passion* or *The Musical Offering*, which is not to me boring. So I don’t want to hear explanations why [they] wrote it. I’d like, “Does it work or not? Does it come across?”

KM: The four composition teachers that you mentioned. Can you tell me where they’re from, where you encountered them? How many were from Manhattan School of Music?

WV: I want to be very polite not talking about people. I don’t want to disparage them. When I was young, I was very insecure and therefore, arrogant, which goes together. But David Diamond was...I’d have to rethink him. He may be a better teacher than I always think of him as being. He was very egotistical. He was not nice, but he also, as I’m thinking, had insight into things that probably were good. Oddly enough, his own music, I really like it. His fourth string quartet is very well written. He has a uniqueness about his music. When I heard that David Diamond was going to teach at Manhattan School of Music, in 1965 he came, I thought “Woah” because I heard some of his music so I pictured him to be a person that was very likeable. He was not likeable, but his music is good. Mario Davidovsky is still alive. He didn’t know what to do with me. For my master’s, I studied with him. His music would be very electronic. My music sounded, at that point, very simplified. So he’d be sitting there like, “What am I supposed to say to this guy who’s 24?” or whatever age I was, 23. It’s like he’s just off in another realm from what I do. There were people who were doing that, minimalists. I was minimalist, you know, back when you didn’t hear about it essentially. I wasn’t influenced by Philip Glass. I’d never heard of him nor did I write like him then. One time he [Davidovsky] said to me, which is very nice, he said, “You have a reputation here for being a genius, I understand that.” My strongest gifts are in being creative and having an imagination more than technically being that I could write a piece for full orchestra and if I walked into the rehearsal, and if one clarinet hit one note wrong in m. 79, I would say, “Back in m. 79 that note was wrong,” and it’s a 12-tone piece. So I’m not at that level. When I hear my music, I can hear when it’s right or wrong. Nicolas Flagello was an extremely talented



musician, probably the most of all of them intrinsically. He could hear everything, played scores on the piano, just phenomenal. His music is very...it's like almost Late Romantic. He studied with Vittorio Giannini before him and that was the style he worked in, which is fine. That's equally good. You see, I'll go back in time to what I thought when I was 20 years old and that's not what I would think now, so I have to revise all my thinking. He'd be teaching us, we'd be standing four or five students around the piano, this is freshman and sophomore year particularly, and he'd say, "You boys don't know this?" We'd all be there thinking, "No, we don't know this." If I was a little older and more assertive, I would have said, "No I don't know it. You're supposed to teach us." He really didn't teach, and then again, he was making some comments... You know, I'd have to go back in time and observe what's going on. So my opinions of them, I really can't trust them.

KM: So you knew David Diamond from Manhattan School of Music?

WV: Yes, I knew of him before he taught me. I knew who he was. I knew of Mario Davidovsky before he taught me.

KM: But you studied with them at Manhattan? All four of them?

WV: All four of them. David Diamond had a power struggle with Ludmila Ulehla. She won and he left. Mario Davidovsky replaced him. They wanted a big composer with a name. Mario Davidovsky went on to teach somewhere bigger and he won a Pulitzer Prize, but that was after he taught me. Ludmila Ulehla continued to teach. She passed away about 3 years ago. She was quite old and she was teaching, I don't know exactly when she stopped teaching, but she was teaching till 80 years old or something. So she continued to teach a long time. Nicolas Flagello died really pretty young. I forget, he might have been like 50 or something when he died. He was a very talented man. So those were my only teachers in composition.

KM: So you did your undergrad and master's at...

WV: Everything at Manhattan School of Music except I took one course in electronic music at The New School for Social Research.

KM: So these four teachers, did you float back and forth between them?

WV: Well, they taught different courses. So form and analysis would be Ludmila Ulehla, orchestration and something else would have been Nicolas Flagello. Then when you get to be a junior, you get the big shot composer teacher, that would be David Diamond by the time I was there. It had been Vittorio Giannini before him, who was then semi-retired or retired. You would still get the other teachers, but less. Even for my master's degree, I remember having Ludmila Ulehla. I don't remember having Nicolas Flagello for my master's. So it would be a couple different teachers. My relationship with them was better/worse, never very close or friend. Actually, Nicolas Flagello would be the closest to being a friend. I did go to his house a couple times with a couple other students. He

was probably the friendliest in a certain kind of way. This is like psychotherapy. I'm lying on the couch right now. I see things very differently in many respects than I did when I was young.

KM: I want to talk a little bit about *Acts of Kindness* again. When we talked about "Bridge and Roses" you mentioned that the story was told by Rev. Peter Olsen. Is that your pastor?

WV: No. He was a member of our church at a time when he was a lawyer, not a pastor. That would be why I knew him. When he was pastoring, that story was before I would have known him. He must have told the story sometime because I heard the story.

KM: Can you discuss your process for composing *Acts of Kindness*? Did you revise older versions like you did with "Benalisa"?

WV: Do I have older versions? That would be interesting for you if I have them. I do. There are older versions I have of *Acts of Kindness*, some of them from 2003. The former title was *Acts of Compassion*. "Radishes Not Tomatoes" [final version titled "First Journey"] was written on August 29, 2003. The woman selling vegetables, it's from her standpoint. What did the music sound like? I had written a vocal line, which I often will do vocal lines first, [and] very little accompaniment. (Vollinger sings and plays on his keyboard part of the original version of "Second Journey." "My husband was a brave poet..." The text was originally from Osip Mandelstam's wife's point of view.) So I did not have a chaconne at that point. "The Necklace" [original version of "Two Necklaces"] piano part has a similarity to the [final version's] piano part but it isn't following a progression. By the way, this looks like to me, it would be very likely to play with one hand. I think the final version in *Acts of Kindness* might also be playable on one hand.

KM: So the main difference between the original and final version of *Acts of Kindness* is in the earlier version, you didn't have a chaconne that you were composing around?

WV: That's true. I'm going to explain that in a minute. I have also a score where I just had the chaconne chords written. (Vollinger plays the progression.) So I'm now looking at the necklace one, could that be played with one hand? No, it could not be played with one hand. What's different in "Two Necklaces" [compared to the original version], almost entirely the accompaniment is only one note at a time. It's rapid, but it's one note at a time except for when we get to "the girl cried." So momentarily it's a chord. Then there's a place where you hold the notes down. There is actually a chord on "to wear." So the idea of that is, you have almost only one note at a time. I like it better, by the way, when I compose, to have a rule that I almost follow, but not absolutely rigidly.

KM: I have one more question and it's along those lines of kindness—now it's interesting you said the title has evolved over time—but how did you decide on the title for *Acts of Kindness*? How has kindness or lack of kindness influenced you? Basically, why did you decide to do a cycle on acts of kindness? Then a second question, do you have any scripture verses that come to mind that have shaped your view on kindness?

WV: Well the first one, why was I interested in that as a subject? I would be interested in that as a subject because I probably used to hear about “random acts of kindness.” Things like, you’re going through a tollbooth, you pay and say, “This is for the guy behind me.” Or you’re sitting in a restaurant and somebody already paid for your meal. So I probably heard about that, and that led to talking to my friend Raymond Beegle about this idea. I know that was a very formative thing, finding some of these stories. So why did I want to write about kindness? Because it’s a very good thing to write about as I try to write music which is from God, but it isn’t, “Oh it’s a religious piece.” It’s to be in a secular market. This quote is very applicable...the man who wrote *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller, who used to raise sheep and knew a lot about sheep, wrote a book explaining the 23rd psalm, which sold millions of copies in many, many languages. He spoke at our church in 1986 and he told a story. Once when he was on a men’s retreat, a man came up to him and said, “Mr. Keller, how long has it been since you’ve left the secular world for the sacred?” And he said, “I never left it. With God, there’s no distinction between sacred and secular.” So that’s a very important thing for me in all the music I write. I don’t like it being, “Oh we’re being religious now. It must be Sunday.” I’d like it to be for any day. There’s another quote, “Witness to Christ at all times using words if necessary.” That’s more how you live in other words. So at any rate, I want to touch people’s hearts, but I don’t want to hit them over the head with a Bible. A little of that may be cowardice too. That could be a factor. “I don’t know if they’ll reject this because it’s too religious.” So my music is usually, not always, but usually not very explicitly Christian. Occasionally it is, but often not. So I’d like to touch people in a secular world. The second question is a scripture that goes with...

KM: Yes, if there are any specific scripture verses that have shaped your view on kindness?

WV: It may not have shaped writing this piece of music, [but] I’m an extrovert because when I talk to people, usually I get energized if I’m saying something kind. If I’m in a cranky mood and go into a supermarket, and I talk to someone for one minute and act friendly, my mood changes. So there is something Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love another, that your joy may be full.”<sup>94</sup> So it makes you be happy. Also God is love. So love because God is love. It actually isn’t about love, the piece, it’s about compassion or kindness, thinking about another person. They’re all compassionate acts.

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<sup>94</sup> From the New King James Version, John 15:11-12 reads, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

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