

FIRELIGHT: A ONE-ACT OPERA EXPLORING THE LIGHT AND DARKNESS OF  
HUMAN TRAITS WITHIN DIVINE BEINGS

A Thesis  
by  
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Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF MUSIC

May 2022  
Hayes School of Music

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## **Abstract**

### **FIRELIGHT: A ONE-ACT OPERA EXPLORING THE LIGHT AND DARKNESS OF HUMAN TRAITS WITHIN DIVINE BEINGS**

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This thesis is the prose companion to the score of Firelight, the one-act opera that explores the relationship between light and darkness through the lens of gods and goddesses. These characters and story are original creations of the author. The introduction explains the ideation of the project, and the following sections delve into the storyline, musical aspects and motifs, and finally the themes portrayed by characters, music, and plot.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Dr. Andrew Hannon, my composition teacher, for encouraging this idea in its nascence last April, and for offering invaluable feedback, experienced suggestions, and enthusiasm for my work.

Thank you to Dr. Gennard Lombardozzi, the director of opera at Appalachian State University, for being excited about my idea and willing to collaborate at every stage of its creation and culmination.

Thank you to Dr. Nicholas Cline, Dr. Victor Mansure, and Dr. Hiu-wah Au, for being on my thesis committee and providing vital assistance and support throughout my studies.

Thank you to T.J. Anderson for conducting the shows and running rehearsals, and for being a listening ear when frustrations arose.

Thank you to Michael Corts for accompanying rehearsals, helping me find musicians, and playing marimba in the performances.

Thank you to Shae Schmalzbauer, Grace McKittrick, Sofi Rohlman, Morgan Swales, Malcolm Vaughn, J.J. Robinson, and Joe Davis for doing outstanding work playing these characters and singing their songs, and for making me laugh until I cried during rehearsals.

Thank you to the following musicians for being willing to play my work; for attending rehearsals and playing in performances:

Flute – Ashley Baucom  
Oboe - Emily Jones  
Clarinet - Douglas Hoffman  
Bassoon - Vernon Prater  
Horn - Matthew Rebadow  
Harp/Keyboard – Ethan Swansondevore  
Marimba - Michael Corts  
Drum/Percussion – Andrew Litton  
Violin I - Juanel Figueroa  
Violin II – Julia Chandler  
Viola - Ryan Stukes  
Cello - Emma Tracy  
Double Bass – Fletcher Parks

Thank you to the present and past members of the composition studio at Appalachian and the Appalachian Student Composers Association for your unending support and encouragement when challenges arose.

Thank you to my mom, Andrea, who read me stories when I was little and always encouraged me to dream and to make up my own stories.

Finally, thank you to everyone and anyone who reads this or attends a performance of my show. I hope you find something in the light of the fire.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Elsie, who passed away during my graduate studies and was ever a supporter and champion of my artistic endeavors.

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## Introduction

When I first began to formulate what this opera would be, all I knew was that I wanted to pick specific traits for each character to represent. My first step in deciding what traits would be showcased was deciding whether the characters would be full-blown caricatures of these traits, or if I would explore more in-depth, gray characteristics. What I landed on eventually was that each character would represent a trait that had both positive and negative aspects, and that their arias would reflect this dichotomy. I chose to use characters that were gods/goddesses because I've always found inspiration and excitement in fantasy worlds and have always been intrigued by the stories of the Greek, Roman, and Norse pantheons, and how despite their divinity, the gods/goddesses made mistakes. In this way, humans have, for ages, used divine beings to understand themselves in greater depth.

In *Firelight*, there are four main gods/goddesses: Elenia, the Goddess of Sky and Sea, representing Selflessness; Saeva, the Goddess of Animals and Living Beings, representing Positivity; Iros, the God of Earth and Harvest, representing Confidence; and Calixtos, the God of Darkness and Night, representing Self-Preservation.

I chose these particular traits because they each have clear implications of “good” and “bad.” Selflessness can either be altruistic or lead to self-hatred or giving too much of oneself; positivity can encourage oneself and others but can also easily breach the threshold of being inauthentic; confidence can yield fine leaders but can morph into conceit and corruption; and self-preservation can provide protection and self-care, but can also prevent connection with others.

While writing the plot for this short opera, I found myself wishing I could continue it with an Act II to round out the story more, but I will have to pursue that project another time. For

now, Elenia ends the opera with her aria, “I Won’t Forget,” which is the only aria showcasing a positive side of a trait in the second half of the show.

This story also explores themes of light and darkness, focusing particularly on Calixtos’s inner struggle with a power that most assume is based in depravity. I wanted to highlight the idea that light and dark are neither inherently good nor evil, despite deeply held assumptions each of us may have.

## Chapter I: The Story

To map out the plot, I utilized a free online software called Milanote to create a storyboard, of which the first two boxes are pictured below (Figure 1).

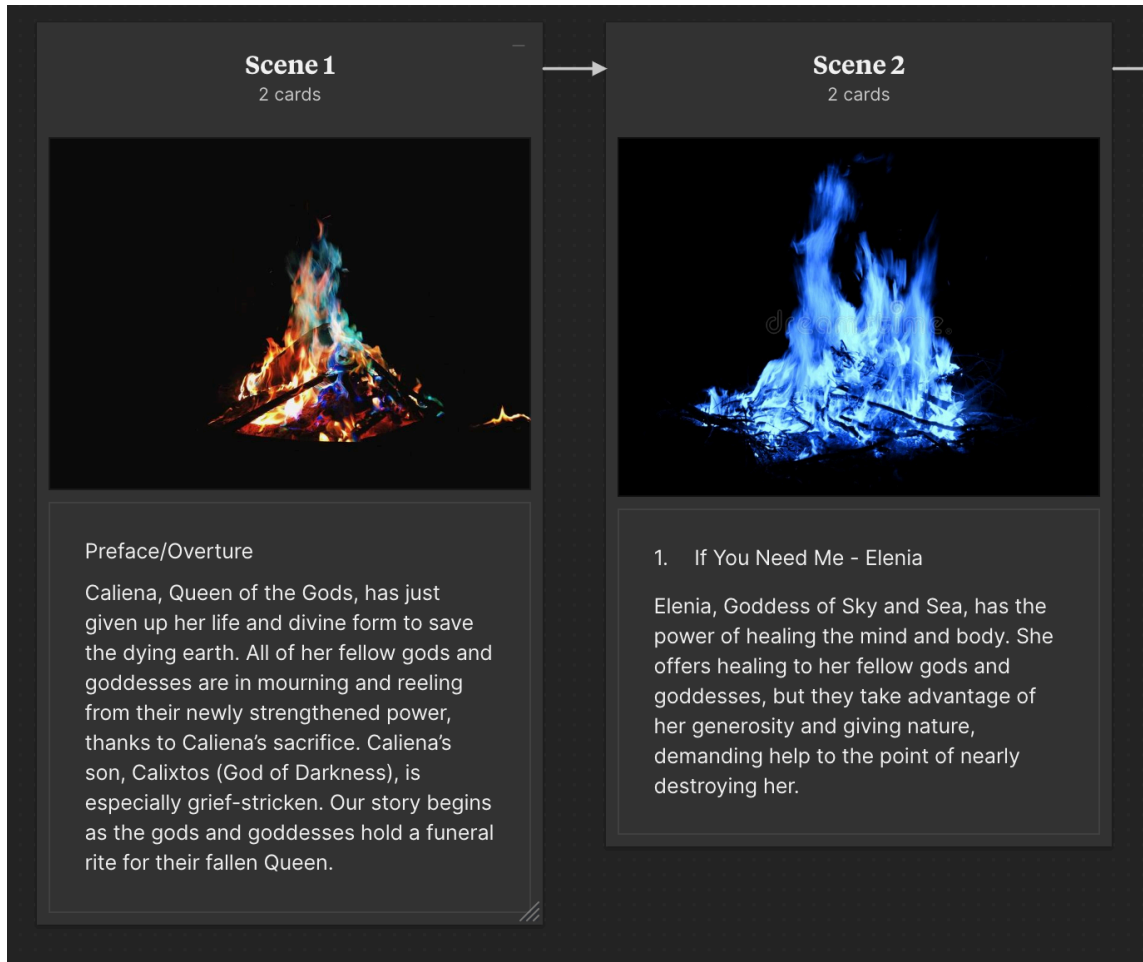


Figure 1: Screenshot of the first two graphics/descriptions from the storyboard, outlining the first two scenes.

The first scene takes place with the fewest non-musical elements. It provides exposition for the audience and context for when the story begins. The storyteller informs the audience that Caliena, the Queen of the Gods, has given up her life essence to save the dying earth, and as a result the remaining gods of Sky and Sea, Darkness and Night, Earth and Harvest, and Animals and Living Beings have become more powerful. The music begins with the Overture, Before the

Dawn, where the funeral rites for Caliena are taking place. Once this has concluded, the first aria begins, “If You Need Me,” sung by Elenia. Elenia, who represents Selflessness, assures her fellow gods and goddesses that she is there for them, to comfort them while they grieve—yet it becomes apparent that she is neglecting her own needs in the process of helping the others. The subsequent aria and scene is an aria sung by Calixtos, who successfully drives off the gods and goddesses taking advantage of Elenia, and then sings to her about taking care of herself and not letting others push her around. Elenia leaves, and as she walks away the audience can see Calixtos pining after her.

Iros, who has been eavesdropping on the last bit of their conversation and Calixtos’s moment of vulnerability, appears out of the trees and assures Calixtos that he will gather all necessary materials for the impending ritual that will decide who will take Caliena’s place. Calixtos is just weary enough from grief to acquiesce, and he falls asleep alongside the others. Iros expresses his confidence that he will be chosen when the dawn comes. Following Iros’s song, Saeva appears and sings a short piece honoring him, “Ode to Iros.” It’s clear that she is infatuated with him.

When the morning arrives, everyone begins gathering around the fire. Iros passes out the materials he’s gathered (“The bark of an oak tree, the soil from the ground, the singing of the western wind, and a star plucked from the sky...”) to the others. Calixtos expresses his desire to hurry up with the proceedings so he can leave, which ignites protest from Elenia. She asks him to stay, telling him that his self-imposed exile is meaningless and that she loves him anyway (“Despite what you think you shielded me from, I love you...”), indicating further that they have a romantic history with one another. Calixtos is stunned and speechless, and the scene shifts over to Iros and Saeva, who wonder briefly what Elenia and Calixtos are talking about before it’s time

for them all to gather up again, and each of them kneels before the eternal fire, which was lit by Caliena herself. To the utter bewilderment of everyone there, Elenia is chosen as the new Queen of the Gods.

Iros is clearly infuriated by this turn of events, Saeva attempts to appease him and convince herself and the rest of them that everything is completely fine, and this forced positivity sends Calixtos over the edge. He reprimands her for moving on too quickly from Caliena's death, and in response Iros lashes out and tells Calixtos that his powers are evil, that he is weak, and that he cannot be trusted. Calixtos, who has always feared these things to be true of himself, cries out, launching Iros away from him and killing every blade of grass and tree within a hundred feet. The eternal fire snuffs out.

Saeva rushes to Iros's aid, and Calixtos flees, closely followed by Elenia. Iros recovers rather quickly, still furious, and entirely focused on the fact that he was not chosen as king. He sings about "What Makes a God," a scathing diatribe of his fellow gods and their inadequacies, completely unconcerned about the snuffed-out fire until he reaches the end of his song, where he attempts to reignite it. Surely, he thinks, that will prove once and for all that he is meant to be king. But it is not so—the fire does not reignite at his bidding, and Iros begrudgingly, with maniacal laughter, concedes that Elenia is queen. He insists then, however, that Calixtos must be sent back to the realm of darkness. Here it is clear that Iros is angry with Calixtos not for hurting him, since he was mostly uninjured, but that he is spiteful towards Calixtos's gloomy nature and seeking to take him from Elenia in "fairness." In his mind, if he doesn't get to be king, then she shouldn't get to both be queen *and* keep Calixtos around.

The scene shifts to where Calixtos and Elenia have fled, and Calixtos begs Elenia to stay away from him, unsure how to control his power and terrified that he will hurt her or himself. He

sings of how he, the god of darkness, is not meant to live among the gods of life, and anguishes over Iros's hateful words. Elenia tries to insist that everything is all right, but Calixtos is spiraling in his own self-loathing and self-pity. He is concerned about his power being too strong, but he is also distraught by what the mortals think of him, calling him "death-bringer," "soul-taker," and "grief-giver." At the end of his aria, he is all but decided—he is meant to be alone, and should leave in order to protect himself and Elenia.

At the start of the final aria and scene, Elenia is resolute and calm as she kneels beside Calixtos and takes his face in her hands. She sings to him that she knows him, that she sees him clearly, and that his power does not frighten her—it is his own self-doubt that makes his power kill things. Calixtos still appears unconvinced, so Elenia stands and tells him that he was always the one telling her to be kind to herself, and that his solace in the darkness proves that the dark is not evil or hurtful. She, in fact, longs for the darkness herself as a reprieve from all that is expected of her.

Seeing that Calixtos appears unmoved by her declarations, Elenia gets angry, telling him that he doesn't know—or perhaps doesn't care—that she is heartbroken when he's not around. As she spirals into further desperation, Calixtos appears hesitant to leave until he spots Iros, Saeva, and the others approaching through the trees. Just as Elenia sings her final line to Calixtos ("If you leave me now, I won't forget!"), he disappears.

Time suspends and Elenia quietly tells Calixtos, or perhaps herself, that she is there if needed, but her heart is no longer open for the taking. Slowly, she turns to find the others behind her, furious and mob-like, and continues her reprisal of her first aria, now with lyrics that shift into developing boundaries for herself. Here she has accepted her new role as queen, and gently touches each of the others, calming them as she steps through the group and tells them, "...for

now, I want to be alone,” harking back to the first line Calixtos sings to Elenia: “You know, sometimes, Elenia, you need to be alone.”

This final scene leaves the plot in a rather incomplete spot, and I expect one day I could write additional acts to this story. I have plenty of ideas, but for the sake and scope of this project, the audience—or reader—will have to make do with this partial bit of the larger story.



## Chapter II: Musical Analysis

This opera is orchestrated for the following:

Two Sopranos  
One Tenor  
One Baritone  
Chorus (SATB) – at least one voice per part  
Flute  
Oboe  
Clarinet in B-flat  
Bassoon  
Horn in F  
Marimba  
Drum (taiko or kick drum on stand)  
Harp  
Piano  
Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Double Bass

### **Elenia**

The very first aria begins with light harp and piano texture and strings playing an optimistic melody and chord progression, despite the heaviness of the subject at hand—the queen of the gods recently died. Elenia sings sweetly to her fellow gods and goddesses that she is there for them and that they can count on her. The music, however, turns as she tells them they can “tear [her] apart,” creating a darker undertone to the scene. This is a cluster chord that shifts in and out of two different dissonances before resolving to a normal E-flat chord in root position (Figure 3). The music returns to more consonance before delving back into tension with a tritone in the viola in measure 163 that directly clashes with the other instruments as Elenia sings “My purpose is to heal, and soothe anxiety.”

The image displays a musical score for measures 151-154 of the piece "If You Need Me." The score is written for a vocal ensemble and a string section. The vocal parts are labeled E (E soprano), S (S soprano), I (I soprano), C (C soprano), S/A (Soprano/Alto), and T/B (Tenor/Bass). The instrumental parts are labeled /In. I (First Violin), In. II (Second Violin), Vla. (Viola), Vc. (Violoncello), and D.B. (Double Bass). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: "need me — you can tear me — a — part". The score includes dynamic markings: *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The vocal parts have a melodic line in measure 151, while the instrumental parts have a sustained note in measure 151. The instrumental parts have a melodic line in measure 152, while the vocal parts have a sustained note in measure 152. The instrumental parts have a melodic line in measure 153, while the vocal parts have a sustained note in measure 153. The instrumental parts have a melodic line in measure 154, while the vocal parts have a sustained note in measure 154.

Figure 2: mm. 151-154 of “If You Need Me.”

The remainder of this piece pits major and minor modes against one another in the strings and woodwinds sections to create this growing sense of unease and, ironically, anxiety for the listener.

The high-register harp and piano melody and strings are commonly Elenia’s backdrop throughout the show. She has two motifs that could be considered representative: the ascending eighth-note fifths in the harp, piano, marimba, or other higher-register instrument, and the

descending-by-step half and quarter notes heard for the first time in the transition following her first aria. One hears the first motif when Elenia is doubting herself or feels inadequate, and the listener hears the second when she is being true to herself and who she is.

The listener hears the “self-doubt” motif for the first time at the beginning of her first aria, “If You Need Me,” when Elenia is trying to process her own grief by throwing herself into the care of others and neglecting her own needs (Figure 4). The self-efficacy or self-assuredness motif is heard in the scene right after, when she reunites with Calixtos, whom she loves and has missed terribly (Figure 5). Her self-doubt returns in “The Fire’s Choice,” just after she is chosen as the new queen of the gods, and the second motif returns at the start of her final aria, “I Won’t Forget,” where she sings to Calixtos of her confidence and faith that he is just as “good” as the gods of life (Figures 6-7).



Figure 3: Motif 1: Self-doubt



Figure 4: Motif 2: Self-efficacy



Figure 5: Motif 1: Self-doubt  
(in “The Fire’s Choice”).



Figure 6: Motif 2: Self-efficacy (in “I Won’t Forget.”)

## **Saeva**

Saeva, the goddess of animals/wildlife, who represents positivity, is characterized musically by 6/8 time, upbeat melodies, and dotted rhythms (Figures 8-9).

**Z** ♩ = 65

Fl. *f*

Ob. *f*

B♭ Cl. *mf*

Bsn. *mp*

Figure 7: Saeva's Motif: Positivity ("Ode to Iros").

**JJ**

Flute *mf*

Oboe *mf*

Clarinet in B♭ *mf*

Figure 8: Second appearance ("Breathe").

The music is intended to reflect positivity and optimism, so any time Saeva appears it is largely consonant, with traditional chord progressions, cadences, and 4-measure phrases. In "Breathe," Saeva's immediate reaction to Elenia's being named queen is to try and appease the others—especially Iros—who are shocked and upset by this turn of events. The music in the beginning transitions quickly from repeated sixteenth/eighth (transitioning to 6/8) notes in the cello/bass to slower repeated notes followed by the characteristic two-beat feel in 6/8 time and a major chord progression that evokes cheerfulness. However, as the music continues, it indicates

Saeva's spiral into panicky optimism and false positivity by increasing in speed and returning to the initial minor pedal tones. The climactic point occurs when she begins repeating "no more, no more," on quick eighth notes that are, in measure 443, heard in 2 rather than 3 (hemiola) This aids the music in transitioning to 4/4 time as Calixtos begins to sing (Figure 10).



Figure 9: Measure 442-443 Hemiola ("Breathe").

## Iros

Iros, the god of earth and harvest, who represents confidence that morphs into narcissism, is the one character that may be considered a "villain" in this story, and the music utilizes heavy irony to achieve this. His first aria begins in A major with him interrupting Calixtos, who sings his aria in the key of E-flat. These distantly-related keys are meant to reflect the disconnect between what Iros is saying to Calixtos ("...friend, how are you?") and his ulterior motives, as well as the stark difference between Iros's and Calixtos's personalities. Iros's aria is upbeat and bouncy, switching back and forth between I and V in the bass line. Unlike other characters, Iros does not have consistent motifs that represent him, because he can be seen as a sort of "chameleon" who adjusts his behavior depending on who he intends to manipulate so he can get what he wants. His two arias are starkly different from one another, with perhaps the only similarity being the I-V figures in the bass. Even these, though, are far more varied than in his first aria, emulating more of a walking bass line. "What Makes a God," contains blues elements and is the only piece that's in 12/8 time. The place where this piece happens in the story is significant; it has a different soundscape than most other pieces, and further indicates Iros's

disconnect with his fellow gods and goddesses. While Saeva supports Iros and loves him, these feelings are not reciprocated; Iros is far too in love with himself to love another.

## **Calixtos**

Calixtos is the character that deals with the darkest emotions, which is fitting, considering that he is the god of darkness and represents self-preservation. At the beginning of the show, he sings to Elenia about protecting herself and not letting others take advantage of her, and his encouragement is accompanied by a recurring figure of triplets and eighths that move the music forward, as if he's nudging her into believing in herself. Conversely, when this figure reappears in "The Fire's Choice," it is beneath Elenia's encouragement of Calixtos, asking him to stay among the gods of life and to not let them tell him he's "dangerous or full of hate."

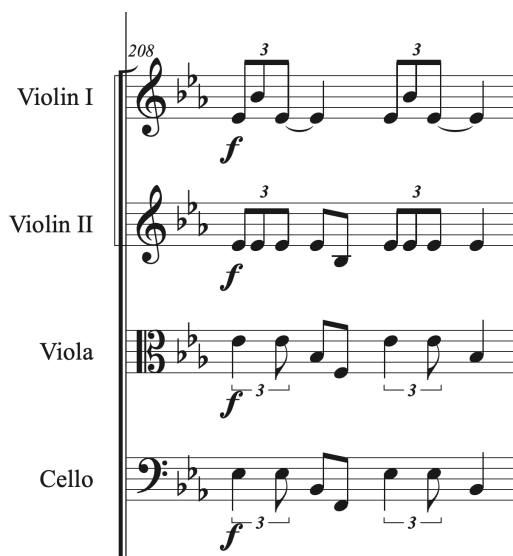


Figure 10: Encouragement motif ("The Queen of Sky and Sea").



Figure 11: Encouragement motif ("The Fire's Choice").

Calixtos's first aria is full of encouragement generally, and cadences at measure 38 on what my singers have dubbed the "love chord," which is an A-flat add9 chord. This chord reappears in "The Fire's Choice" also, when Elenia tells Calixtos she loves him (Figure 13).

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Harp

Piano

Elenia

Saeva

Iros

Calixtos

Soprano/Alto

Tenor/Bass

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

*mf*

*mp*

ev-er chan-ging ev-er thaw-ing my a-tro-phied heart

Figure 12: “Love Chord” (“The Queen of Sky and Sea”).

Calixtos’s second aria calls back to his first, this time with changed lyrics and adjusted melody in some places. In his first aria, he sings, “The God of Darkness knows a bit about the greed of gods; you make a leaf and they’ll demand a tree.” Here, he is reeling from his own lack of control of his power, and says, “The God of Darkness can’t belong among the gods of life; I was a fool to think it otherwise—just look around and see.” These two lines mimic one another melodically, but the second aria, “Death-Bringer,” has a markedly darker tone and soundscape (Figures 14-15). This melody repeats itself one last time at the end of this second aria, and in order to convey and instill despair, the texture is far thinner and has a sparse feeling compared to the full chords and textures from previous iterations.

Figure 13 is a musical score for a scene titled "Self-assuredness ('The Queen of Sky and Sea')". It features a full orchestral and vocal ensemble. The instruments listed on the left are Piano, Elenia, Saeva, Iros, Calixtos, Soprano/Alto, Tenor/Bass, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is in 2/4 time and begins at measure 202. Calixtos has a vocal line with the lyrics: "bout the greed of Gods; you make a leaf and they'll de-mand a tree...". The piano accompaniment is dense, with the left hand playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and the right hand playing chords. The strings provide a steady harmonic background.

Figure 13: Self-assuredness (“The Queen of Sky and Sea”).

Figure 14 is a musical score for a scene titled "Despair ('Death-Bringer')". It features a sparse orchestral and vocal ensemble. The instruments listed on the left are Piano, Elenia, Saeva, Iros, Calixtos, Soprano/Alto, Tenor/Bass, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is in 2/4 time and begins at measure 569. Calixtos has a vocal line with the lyrics: "you The God of Dark-ness is a-lone... it's how it's meant to be". The piano accompaniment is sparse, with the left hand playing a single note and the right hand playing chords. The strings are mostly silent, with only the cello and double bass providing a low harmonic background. The overall mood is dark and despairing.

Figure 14: Despair (“Death-Bringer”).



In “The Queen of Sky and Sea,” Calixtos’s melody is characterized by swiftly moving sixteenth notes that indicate movement and optimism, while in “Death-Bringer,” the pedal tone in the cello and the sparse, quiet harp cluster chords and descending stepwise motion evoke hopelessness and resignation.

### Chapter III: Story Themes

The themes of this story are explored through both the story and the musical aspects included throughout. Each main character represents a very human trait, and their arias explore the positive and negative sides of those traits. There is also the overarching theme of light vs. dark, and how neither is inherently good or evil. I will first expound upon the traits and how they are portrayed by each character.

#### **Character Traits Portrayed in Arias**

The arias are sung in a character-organized palindrome, meaning that Elenia sings first and last, Calixtos second and penultimate, Iros third and sixth, and Saeva fourth and fifth. This is represented visually in Figure 15 for a more comprehensive example. The palindrome is intended to represent the degree to which the characters change or develop; i.e. Elenia undergoes the most drastic character development and growth, in terms of the difference in tone between her first and second arias (Figure 16).

Elenia	Calixtos	Iros	Saeva	Saeva	Iros	Calixtos	Elenia
Aria 1	Aria 1	Aria 1	Ariette	Aria	Aria 2	Aria 2	Aria 2

Figure 15: Order of Arias.

Elenia is also the only character that sees a positive shift in her represented trait; all others present the positive side of their trait first and then the reverse. Elenia's selflessness in the beginning is unhealthy and damaging to her physical and mental health—putting others before oneself to one's own detriment is not beneficial and not sustainable. By the time she is chosen as the new queen, her behavior is already exuding greater confidence and self-efficacy as she speaks to Calixtos, finally being fully honest about her feelings for him. She also does for him

what he does for her earlier in the show; tells him to not let the others bully him and toss him aside.

In Elenia's final aria, and the final aria of the show, she exudes resoluteness, authority, and confidence. She continues to try and convince Calixtos that he belongs among them, belongs with her, which still suggests her selfless nature, and even after Calixtos leaves and breaks her heart, she calms the others and tells them she is still there if they need her. The difference this time is that Elenia provides boundaries for herself so that she will not be unable to live peacefully.

When working with singers taking on Elenia's role, I found that they empathized heavily with Elenia's inner struggle and ultimate triumph. I relate to Elenia in some ways, myself, and it was my intention to find a trait that would allow both performers and listeners to process their own lived experiences in a fictional and musical setting. In patriarchal societies, many women or feminine people are taught from a young age to be polite, selfless, unassuming, and demure. Overcoming these deeply-rooted conditionings is a challenge many people face as they enter environments that require a more assertive nature, and as they learn to be comfortable and confident in their own skin.

Calixtos, who represents self-preservation, sings to Elenia in his first aria of taking care of oneself, and assuring her that she is "more than good enough." In this positive presentation of his assigned trait, encouraging words are found that allude to something closer to self-care and confidence in oneself as opposed to self-protection and preservation at all costs. Calixtos is consistently presented as rather grouchy and irritable, but it's not until the end of "Breathe" that his self-preservation launches to the other end of the spectrum.

Calixtos tells Saeva in “Breathe” that he “deserves to grieve” and “deserves to weep,” but these statements are immediately ridiculed by Iros, who calls him a “sniveling beast” who “hides and slithers in the dark.” Many men and masculine people are brought up to hide their feelings and not express themselves, and even when they have learned that they deserve to feel things, there are still those that would mock them for doing so. At the end of “Breathe,” when Calixtos accidentally snuffs out the fire and blasts Iros backward, he runs off, pursued by Elenia. Calixtos’s second aria, “Death-Bringer,” addresses his deeply-rooted fears about himself and his power.

With Iros’s words in his mind, Calixtos wrestles with his impulse to disappear and protect himself and his desire to stay with Elenia. His statements in his final aria are steeped in self-doubt and self-pity, as if he’s convincing himself to find a reason to leave. In this way, Calixtos’s second aria, which is intended to present the negative aspects of self-preservation, is far less “on the nose,” so to speak, than the others. One must read between the lines and discover that his innate sense of self-preservation is what drives him, and is ultimately the catalyst for his choice to leave and return to the realm of darkness. Calixtos loves Elenia, and she loves him, but his assurances to her in his first aria and his abandonment of her in the final one portray him as hypocritical and selfish. Calixtos is, like all the other characters, intended to be relatable, but also very much flawed, as humans are themselves.

Iros undergoes little development, and the changes he does exhibit are not positive. His first aria, “Leave it All to Me,” is a jaunty tune where he assures Calixtos and the others that he will take care of all the preparations for the ceremony where the new leader of the gods will be chosen. He exudes confidence and joviality, taking on responsibilities despite his own grief. It is clear, however, from his initial interactions with Calixtos and his closing line (“Who will be our

new king? Who is worthy? I think it's me!") that his actions have an ulterior motive that is self-serving. Iros is the type of character that would not be unkind if he were chosen as king—would, in fact, make a good leader—but because he does not get the recognition he thinks he deserves, he lashes out at others and acts out of spite and jealousy. While listeners and/or audience members are not likely to find Iros relatable once he's portrayed in a bad light, he is funny and charming as a character, and is meant to be likeable. Iros serves as a mild antagonist, but he also reveals the consequences of buying into the idea that you must win everything in order to feel successful and valued by others. Iros's self-worth is largely based on the opinion the others have of him. The moment he is not crowned king, he goes into a rage and speaks cruelly to Calixtos, and his entire second aria denounces the other gods' abilities to lead and assume their respective roles.

Saeva is a character I had the least time to develop, and it is my hope that anyone who may see this opera realizes the complexity of her personality and her situation. Like Elenia, she is trapped by her conditioning; Saeva is always positive, and always seeking to immediately diffuse a tense situation even if negative feelings are warranted. Saeva's arias are unique in that the first one is a short, one-dimensional love song for Iros ("Ode to Iros") and the second one is the only aria in the show that flips from positive to negative during the song, which adds a layer of irony. Saeva goes from almost immediately accepting that Elenia is queen and trying to appease Iros to insisting that they do not need to grieve any longer, and that sadness is something that should be avoided. Here Saeva is not only trying to deescalate a brewing conflict, but also being faced directly with her own grief and the desire to push it away, lest it overwhelm her.

This false positivity helps no one in the end, and even creates further conflict when Calixtos hears her speak so flippantly about his mother's sacrifice. The intention here is to

display that being positive all the time is not necessarily a good thing and does not always yield a better outcome when faced with conflict or challenges.

### **Light and Darkness**

The themes of light and darkness are apparent throughout the show, in both the story and music. The god of darkness himself, sung by a baritone, is portrayed as more of a “hero” (albeit a very flawed one) than the god of earth, sung by a tenor, and typically the tenor in operas is the hero of the story. Higher-register instruments are typically associated with light, and I utilize those in parts of the story that are rather dark.

Elenia’s final aria is the one that contains the most outward representation and commentary on the nature of darkness and its relation to light. In the aria before, Calixtos says that the mortals believe him to be evil, and call him “death-bringer,” “soul-taker,” and “grief-giver.” Elenia tells Calixtos that he himself has found solace in the realm of darkness for years, and if that place is peaceful, then his power can be peaceful as well. She also further alludes to the interconnectedness of light and darkness with the line that follows, “We’d have no stars without the night.” In the next breath, she even insinuates that perhaps she is glad that the Eternal Fire has gone out:

*I long for the darkness, the coolness of night  
I never wanted glory, never pined for power or fame,  
A goddess, but an insect  
who is yearning for reprieve from the bright flame.*

The intention here is to showcase the concept that both darkness and light can be harsh. Calixtos’s outburst at Iros’s scathing comments causes death and destruction, but at the same time, Elenia finds herself exhausted by their dependence upon the Eternal Flame and the new

responsibility that has been thrust upon her. Nighttime is the time of rest and rejuvenation, after all—so why can't darkness be peaceful and healing?

Exemplifying this theme further is the fact that the most upbeat arias in the show belong to Iros and Saeva, both of whom exhibit rather negative qualities as conflict arises. Darkness and evil are not synonymous, as light and goodness are not, either. The title and setting of the show are also tied to the connection and necessary combination of light and darkness. Firelight is more easily visible when it is dark outside, and the fire itself, which is a source of light, can cast shadows.

## **Conclusion**

This project was one of the most difficult but rewarding creative endeavors I have undertaken as both an artist and an academic. I have never produced so much music in such a short time frame, and never music of this quality. I am immensely proud of the work I have done and the work of everyone with whom I've collaborated. In the future I hope to take on projects and compositions with this same level of inspiration and excitement.

As mentioned in my introduction, humans have spent millennia telling stories of gods and goddesses or other-worldly beings in order to more fully understand their own experiences and tendencies, and this story and music is meant to do the same. I do hope to one day write an additional act to this story so it may be continued and expanded upon further.



## **Vita**

Hayley Turner was born in Greensboro, NC in 1995. She attended K-12 school in Guilford County, graduating from Weaver Academy for the Performing and Visual Arts in 2014. She is currently a second-year graduate student at Appalachian State University pursuing both her Master's in Music Composition and her Master's in Business Administration. She holds a Bachelor's in Music Education from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro where she studied voice with Dr. Robert Bracey, and taught middle school chorus and theatre for two years prior to attending graduate school. Under the instruction of composers Dr. Andrew Hannon and Dr. Nicholas Cline, she has completed her requirements for her MM and will be working this summer as an intern for the DHS Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency on the Talent Acquisition team before completing her MBA in December 2022. She intends to utilize her passion for working with people by seeking full-time employment in HR after graduating and continuing to pursue freelance composition as a creative outlet and additional source of income.