

HOWELL, JOURDAN LAINE, D.M.A., *The Mini-Opera Concept: A Study of Short Works in the Opera Repertory and their Viability in an Educational Forum* (2014)
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- I. Role: March 29th, and March 30th, 2014, 7:30 p.m. and April 1st, 2014, 2:00 p.m.,
Aycock Auditorium, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. *Elvira, Don Giovanni* (Mozart).
- II. Solo Recital: April 19th, 2013, 7:30 p.m., Recital Hall, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. *The Clan of the Lichens* (Abbie Betenis), “Non disperar” and “V’adoro pupille” from *Giulio Cesare* (Handel), *Three Irish Folksong Settings for Flute and Voice* (John Corigliano), *Jägerlied* (Brahms), *Ach Mutter, liebe Mutter* (Brahms), *Walpurgisnacht* (Brahms), *Nuit d’Espagne* (Jules Massenet), *Guitare* (Georges Bizet), *Le Bachelier de Salamanque* (Albert Roussel).
- III. Solo Recital: *The Sweetness of my Dreams* (Jocelyn Hagen), *Canciones para niños* (Xavier Montsalvatge), *La regatta veneziana* and *Le Pesca* (Giacomo Rossini), “Celle qui vient” from *Thaïs* (Jules Massenet), “Evening Prayer” from *Hansel und Gretel* (Englebert Humperdink), *Wiegenlied* (Franz Schubert, Johannes Brahms, Richard Strauss), *What if...* and *Jabberwocky* (Lee Hoiby), *If you become the moon* (Kevin Helppie)

IV. Lecture Recital: October 20th, 2014, 5:30 p.m. Recital Hall, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. *The Worst One Ever* (Gary Belshaw), excerpts from *La Pizza del Destino* (Steve Cohen), *Review* (Jeremy Beck).

V. D.M.A. Research Project. THE MINI-OPERA CONCEPT: A STUDY OF SHORT WORKS IN THE OPERA REPERTORY AND THEIR VIABILITY ON THE EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL STAGES. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the merit of mini-operas as a tool for pedagogic study through the discussion of Gary Belshaw's *The Worst One Ever*, Steve Cohen's *La pizza del Destino*, and Jeremy Beck's *Review*. These works were chosen because they presented specific pedagogic challenges in three areas of study vital to the success of operatic stage performance: vocal technique, acting (theater arts), and operatic stage direction. In addition to their relevance for the training of university-level opera singers, these works were written in the last five decades. This is of importance for two reasons, the first being that the study and performance of these mini-operas supports the effort of composers who are currently contributing to the advancement of the repertoire. Second, students are encouraged to learn and present works that strive to develop the operatic repertoire.

THE MINI-OPERA CONCEPT: A STUDY OF SHORT WORKS
IN THE OPERA REPERTORY AND THEIR VIABILITY
IN AN EDUCATIONAL FORUM

by

Jourdan Laine Howell

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Approved by

Committee Co-Chair

Committee Co-Chair

Dedicated to those who offered aid and understanding throughout the
doctoral process – you are appreciated beyond measure.

“I can’t understand why people are frightened of new ideas.

I’m frightened of the old ones.”

- John Cage

APPROVAL PAGE

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

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Defining Mini-Opera

In 2008 Scottish Opera launched an exploratory project titled *Five:15– Operas Made in Scotland*. The *FIVE:15* project partnered five established composers with five established writers and/or librettists and asked them to compose an operatic event lasting roughly fifteen minutes in length. The purpose was to present the audience with an operatic sampler in hopes of assessing the potential of developing one or more of the works into a full-scale production. The composers involved were challenged to create a complex operatic stage work that would be presented in a very limited time frame, certainly an atypical encounter in the standard operatic repertoire.

Several questions arose from my discovery of the *Five:15* project. Do other operatic works exist which are close to fifteen or twenty minutes in length? If so, are these works practical options for integration into educational programs or mainstage productions? Are these operatic stage works pedagogically beneficial to the student performer and/or student stage director? For the purpose of this dissertation, I will refer to short works of this type as *mini-operas*, operatic works that are twenty minutes in length or less.

This dissertation investigates the benefits and challenges of performing mini-operas in the academic setting. It will demonstrate that the study and performance of mini-operas are important tools in the training of university-level students of singing and stage directing, aiding in their pedagogic development and affording them opportunity to prepare and present a complete role or work. Moreover, further benefits include low cost of production, exposure for lesser-known works, exposure to the operas of living composers, opportunities for academic singers to perform complete roles, and opportunities for novice stage directors to conceptualize a complete work. The challenges include character development, clear story telling, and a general lack of interest in the production of contemporary operas.

This dissertation references a set of standard criteria in order to evaluate the practicality of performing specific mini-operas (the criteria set is explained in chapter two). Finally, I will examine three mini-operas which meet these set criteria: Gary Belshaw's *The Worst One Ever*, Steve Cohen's *La pizza del Destino*, and Jeremy Beck's *Review*. Both the Belshaw and Cohen mini-operas have musical and textual content appropriate for pedagogic work in singing and acting for the undergraduate student. Further, performance of Beck's composition has proven successful at the collegiate level. In my consideration of each mini-opera, I will address students' pedagogic advancement in voice, acting, and stage direction, respectively.

Mini-Opera in Historical Context

The term “mini-opera” is not yet defined in academic textbooks or in literary accounts of operatic history. It is seen in repertoire catalogues, news articles, blog posts, and descriptions of performance programming, specifically those texts that were published in the late 20th-century and early 21st-century. A universally accepted definition of mini-opera is not in use at this time, nor has it been designated as a sub-category of the opera genre. Despite its lack of a commonly accepted definition, composers, art commentators and critics use the term generically to indicate an operatic work of short performance duration.

While the mini-opera concept is currently in development in the industry, the idea of short operatic works has been present from the genre’s inception. One-act operas are often shorter works and have been performed as intermezzi since the early 17th-century. A prime example is Pergolesi’s *La serva padrona*, which lasts roughly 45 minutes. The opera was performed between the acts of Pergolesi’s larger work, *Il prigioniero superbo*.¹ Although short operatic compositions do exist in the standard repertoire of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, the performance duration of much of the repertoire falls between two and four hours. It is not until the 20th-century that we find composers dedicated to the composition of short works. Gian Carlo Menotti and Seymour Barab are examples of two composers whose output is dominated by operas lasting less than two hours. The list of composers who contributed to the mini-opera

¹ Timothy Roden, Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Anthology for Music in Western Civilization, Volume II: The Enlightenment to the Present* (Boston, MA: Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2009), 757.

output in the 20th century includes Samuel Barber (*A Hand of Bridge*), Marc Blitzstein (*Harpies*), Lee Hoiby (*Bon Appétit!* and *The Italian Lesson*), Darius Milhaud (*Trois-Opéra Minutes*), and Thomas Pasatieri (*The Women*) among others.

As opera moves into the 21st-century, more composers are contributing operatic works to the repertoire that are substantially shorter than those found in the standard repertoire. Evidence of this is seen in repertoire catalogues and in festival promotion these works. Despite the existence of a number of these works, a clear call to place mini-operas in a sub-category of the opera genre has not occurred.

Scottish Opera's *Five:15* and *Baden-Baden 1927*

First performed in Edinburgh, Scottish Opera's *Five:15* programming included Craig Armstrong's *Gesualdo*, Suhayl Saadi's *Queen of Govern*, Alexander McCall Smith's *Dream Angus*, Bernard MacLaverty's *The King's Conjecture*, and Ron Butlin's *The Perfect Woman*.² The Scottish Opera, which ran *Five:15* for seven performances, developed a method of "exploring potential [repertoire] with minimum risk," challenging composers and librettists to focus on "the basics of story-telling rather than experiment."³ Alex Reedijk, Scottish Opera's general director, explained that *Five:15* is about questioning

² Russ Coffey, "5:15: A bloodbath in 15 minutes," *The Telegraph*, February 21, 2008, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3671317/515-A-bloodbath-in-15-minutes.html>.

³ Andrew Clark, "A Scottish Programme of 15-Minute Operas," *The Financial Times*, May 21, 2010, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/c3d228c4-645f-11df-8cba-00144feab49a.html>.

what opera could or should look like in the 21st-century.”⁴ It is but one example of a modern 21st-century event featuring small-scale operas.

Inspired by Scottish Opera’s venture into contemporary opera, Cape Town Opera created the *Five:20 – Operas made in South Africa*,⁵ the purpose of which was “to entice new audiences into theatres to see opera in short bites – musical sandwiches rather than a full course.”⁶ According to Cape Town Opera Managing Director Michael Williams, “It [was] an opportunity to extend the reach of African-made music and give a taste of the work of five seasoned South African composers and adept storytellers. It takes tremendous discipline to put these elements together to form a cogent work within 20 minutes.”⁷

Another example is Gotham Chamber Opera’s 2013 presentation *Baden-Baden 1927*, a recreation of a performance that took place on October 13, 1927 at The Donaueshingen Festival. Founded in 1921, The Donaueschingen Festival “is the oldest and most traditional festival for new music.”⁸ Throughout its history, the festival has showcased the works of musical giants Richard Strauss, Alban Berg, Anton Webern,

⁴ Mark Hughes “Authors Pen 15-Minute Operas in Effort to Entice Younger Audience,” *The Independent*, February 11, 2008, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/news/authors-pen-15minute-operas-in-effort-to-entice-younger-audience-780695.html>.

⁵ ARC, *The Visual University – operas*, http://www.arc.uct.ac.za/the_visual_university/?id=23 (accessed February 7, 2014).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ARC, *The Visual University – operas*, http://www.arc.uct.ac.za/the_visual_university/?id=23 (accessed February 7, 2014).

⁸ Donaueschinger Musiktage. *Festival for New Music since 1921*, <http://www.swr.de/swr2/festivals/donaueschingen/englische-version/-/id=3503406/u05a0m/index.html> (accessed February 2, 2014).

Arnold Schönberg, and Igor Stravinsky.⁹ Continuing into the mid 20th-century, the festival hosted presentations by Boulez, Stockhausen, Cage, and Ligeti.¹⁰

Perhaps the biggest contributor to the continued success of the festival in its infancy was Paul Hindemith. Under his guidance the festival moved from Donaueschingen to Baden-Baden in 1927.¹¹ As part of the festival programming, Hindemith debuted his eleven-minute opera *Hin und zurück* alongside Milhaud's eight-minute *L'Enlèvement d'Europe*, Toch's *Die Prinzessin auf der Erbse*, and Weill's *Mahagonny Songspiel* on October 23, 1927.¹² Gotham Chamber Opera presented the same four works on their stage in October 2013.

In his article "Back to the Future: Gotham Chamber Opera offers four mini-operas from 1927," Alex Ross asserts that "romanticism is out: opera has become terse, lean, and quick on its feet."¹³ According to OPERA America's most recent data, the most frequently produced operas in the 2011-2012 season included *Tosca*, *Così fan tutte*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Traviata*, and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.¹⁴ The productions of these staples of the standard repertoire exist in direct contradiction to Alex Ross's assertion.

⁹ Donaueschinger Musiktage, *Festival for New Music since 1921*, <http://www.swr.de/swr2/festivals/donaueschingen/englische-version/-/id=3503406/u05a0m/index.html> (accessed February 2, 2014).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Foundation Hindemith, *German Chamber Music in Baden-Baden*, <http://www.hindemith.info/en/life-work/biography/1918-1927/leben/baden-baden/> (accessed February 2, 2014).

¹² Fred Cohn, "Baden-Baden 1927," *Opera News* 78, no. 5 (October 23, 2013), accessed October 28, 2013, http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2014/1/Reviews/NEW_YORK_CITY__Baden-Baden_1927.html.

¹³ Alex Ross, "Back to the Future: Gotham Chamber Opera offers four mini-operas from 1927," *The New Yorker* (October 23, 2013), accessed October 28, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/28/back-to-the-future-3>.

¹⁴ Patricia Kiernan Johnson, *Quick Opera Facts*, <http://www.operaamerica.org/content/research/quick1112.aspx> (accessed February 6, 2014).

Consider, however, that Gotham Chamber Opera's Baden-Baden production saw 85% attendance, a very high percentage.¹⁵ While the general opera-goer may prefer Puccini and Mozart, this data shows that a sizeable segment of the opera audience is indeed interested in experiencing mini-operas and works outside of the standard repertoire.

Making Distinctions: One-Act Opera, Operetta, and Anti-opera

The performance duration of operatic works in the standard repertoire is often two to four hours. Sub-categories that denote a shorter duration do exist within the opera genre. These sub-categories include one-act opera, operetta, anti-opera, and mini-opera. As noted above, a mini-opera is defined in this dissertation as an operatic work of twenty minutes in length or less. They may be completed in one act but are not bound by this rule.

A one-act opera is simply an opera that takes place in the course of one act; one-acts are not held to any time requirement. Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, for example, is a one-act opera lasting one hundred eighty minutes, nine times the length of a mini-opera. One-act operas may be categorized as both a one-act and a mini-opera as seen in all three case studies included in this dissertation.

Operetta is not defined in any way by duration; rather it is defined by the use of spoken dialogue and a storyline containing "comic elements and generally a light

¹⁵ Michelle Tabnik, Interview by Jourdan Laine Howell, August 11, 2014. Amarillo, Texas, email interview.

romantic plot.”¹⁶ Two examples of operetta in the standard repertoire include Mozart’s *Der Schauspieldirektor*, which takes place in one act, and Bernstein’s *Candide*, which takes place over two acts. *Der Schauspieldirektor* is a one-act operetta; it is *not* considered a mini-opera because its performance duration is roughly thirty minutes. By definition, a mini-opera may be considered operetta if the work adhered to the plot expectations discussed above.

Anti-opera may be defined as an opera composed in such a way as to contradict or undermine accepted operatic conventions. Composers of anti-opera intentionally avoid typical methods of composing opera. Among the techniques utilized by composers of anti-opera are atypical instrumentation (as heard in Ligeti’s *Le Grand Macabre*), incoherent plots, or decidedly brief duration. According to this definition, all mini-operas may be considered anti-opera with respect to duration.

Each of the aforementioned terms may be applied to one work simultaneously. The significant point to recall is that, for the purpose of this dissertation, a one-act opera, an operetta, and an anti-opera may all be mini-operas if they are twenty minutes in length or less.

¹⁶ Burton D. Fischer, *A History of Opera* (Boca Raton, FL: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2003), 384.

CHAPTER II
WHY STUDY MINI-OPERA?

Learning from Mini-Opera

During the course of research for this dissertation, composers, professional and student opera singers, and both professional and student stage directors were interviewed in order to gain insight into perceived benefits and challenges of mini-opera study. An interview was conducted with bass-baritone Dr. Donald Hartmann, Professor of Voice and guest stage director at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. When asked if mini-opera study is more beneficial than scene study, Dr. Hartmann stated, "I am more convinced that presenting scenes from masterworks is a better developmental tool. The works of Mozart require a different style of movement than the works of Puccini. The suspended action and emotion of a Verdi aria is different than that of Carlisle Floyd."¹⁷ This reaction points to an understandable notion that we should teach from the masterworks because they provide ample opportunity to develop skills necessary to meet the demands of standard repertoire. This does seem to be a prevalent idea throughout schools of music in the United States as repertoire selected for study at these institutions often focuses on opera within the standard repertoire.

¹⁷ Donald Hartmann, Interview by Jourdan Laine Howell, February 25, 2014, Greensboro, North Carolina, email interview.

But the idea that *all* preparatory study should come from these select works, or that the masterworks are the superior teaching tool, may be a limited point of view, particularly if it leads to the dismissal of selections outside the standard repertoire. If students are denied the opportunity to study works outside the standard repertoire they may be ill prepared to tackle non-standard works in the future. This could result in limited career choices with respect to repertoire.

Addressing the viewpoint above that studying portions of a major work is *more* beneficial than studying smaller-scale works in their entirety is beyond the scope of this document. A case can be made that scene study of major works should not be the *only* means for pedagogic growth in singing actors and stage directors. A mini-opera can prepare students to face the challenges of performing a major work in its entirety.

Benefits of Mini-Opera Study

There are several benefits of mini-opera study at the university level. Perhaps the most noticeable is the opportunity for students to tackle a complete role in a condensed amount of time, allowing for concentrated study of a character. Consider for a moment the old adage that one must crawl before one walks, and walk before one runs. A beginning runner does not run in a marathon without ample training; likewise a novice singer should not take on a leading role in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* without first understanding and implementing principles of operatic acting. These principles can be explored through scene study and/or the performance of a mini-opera.

Consider the course of study at various universities in the United States. If a young singer is fortunate enough to secure an audition at a conservatory or prestigious school of music, and is then accepted into the program, he or she will likely be exposed to a rigorous training program that includes focused course work in several disciplines necessary for successful stage performance in opera. For example, at the Juilliard School, undergraduates complete four years of dramatic training for singers, each year building on the preceding year's coursework. *Acting I for Singers* focuses "on the fundamental principles of acting" combined with the reading of "definitive texts."¹⁸ In their second year, students learn to develop character concepts combined with monologue study in *Acting II for Singers*. In their junior year, students spend focused time on the Viewpoints method and apply acting methods from years one and two to aria performance and possibly scene work. It is not until their final year of study that singers at the Juilliard School "focus on integrating and applying their acting technique to the performance of vocal repertoire."¹⁹

Comparatively, the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University offers several in-depth courses for the singing actor including Principles of Acting in Opera, Opera Workshops (beginning and advanced), Vocal Performance Workshops (beginning and advanced), Stage Direction, Stage Management, and Opera Technical Crew.²⁰ Students

¹⁸ Juilliard College Catalog 2013-2014, *Program: Voice, B.M.*, http://catalog.juilliard.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=19&poid=2184&returnto=2094 (accessed March 1, 2014).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jacobs School Bulletin 2013-2014, *Courses: Opera*, <http://music.indiana.edu/departments/academic/opera/courses.shtml> (accessed March 1, 2014).

are offered ample opportunity to study multiple disciplines related to the field of opera that serve to bolster their preparedness for stage performance.

According to the degree plans (Appendix B), if you are student of a program similar to that of Juilliard or the Jacobs School of Music, you receive comprehensive training prior to stepping into a major role in a lengthy production. On the other hand, if a student attends a non-conservatory school or a higher learning institution with a smaller music program, he or she may only have access to one or two Opera Workshop courses. The bulk of his or her stage training takes place on the stage. The material learned in an Opera Workshop course could be supplemented by the implementation of mini-opera study, with these short works bridging the gap between scene study and large-scale roles.

A second benefit of mini-opera study is the limited performance duration afforded thorough study of the musical demands as dictated by the composer.

According to director Leon Major,

The singer's job is extremely demanding: to be in technical control of the voice and body, count bars, find the music's rhythm as well as the rhythm of the scene, watch for the tempo from a conductor...find a pitch, manage complex phrasings, express emotion without tensing the voice, execute musical style, execute acting style...understand and enunciate words clearly, project both music and words to everyone in the house...In addition the singer must understand the character one is playing, work out relationships with other characters on the stage, and react to those other characters.²¹

²¹ Leon Majors, *The Empty Voice: Acting Opera* (Milwaukee, WI: Amadeus Press, 2011), xv-xvi.

Successful execution of all tasks mentioned by Major is a challenge for the seasoned opera singer and may prove significantly more daunting for the student singer to accomplish.

Mini-opera study may help student singers hone the skills required for a successful performance career. The same concept may be applied to the student stage director – limited performance duration affords the novice director the opportunity to hone his or her directing skills without the challenge of conceptualizing a full-scale production.

A third benefit to the study and performance of mini-opera is the minimal production cost often associated with the works. A large portion of the mini-opera output has been attributed to living composers, some of whom act as their own producer and publisher. The result can be a minimal accrual of fees associated with licensing and copyright, which lessens the financial burden on the college or university. In addition, productions costs can be significantly lower because of limited set demands and the use of smaller accompanying orchestral forces. To that end, the lack of extensive set requirements aids in transportability making mini-operas ideal for traditional and non-traditional performance venues.

Perhaps the most obvious benefit of studying the mini-operas written by living composers is the ability to access the composer directly. When performing standard operatic repertoire, this is rare. If we are lucky, we will have access to original manuscripts, letters, and biographical writings; however, in most cases, directors and

actors rely only on secondary sources. In the case of works by living composers, directors and singing actors may have the unique opportunity to consult or collaborate with the composer and gain his or her insight into the production.

Challenges of Mini-Opera Study

The study and performance of mini-opera presents challenges for the young singer and director, with respect to character and plot development. When considering character development in opera, student singers performing in the traditional full-length opera have the benefit of multiple scenes that may offer considerably more action from which to learn and react. The same may hold true for student directors. They may find it easier to develop the plot of a full-length work rather than that of a mini-opera because the increased number of scenes found in a larger work will provide more contextual resources from which the director can make choices to drive the plot forward.

Another challenge is a seemingly inherent resistance of university stage directors to program contemporary works, especially those composed by living composers. According to Conductor David Amos, the resistance for programming and attending performances of new works may be attributed to an aversion to the “sounds of modernity in the serial and atonal music,”²² the roots of which developed in the early

²² David Amos, “The importance of commissioning music,” *SDJewishWorld*, June 17, 2010, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://sdjewishworld.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/the-importance-of-commissioning-music>.

20th century. He asserts that this music “created a strong resistance to anything which hinted of *new music*, or *contemporary*, or *music of our times*, to say nothing of *Avant Garde* and other scary implications.”²³ Amos believes that, “in most instances, modern music is not even given a chance, and when it is played, it is rarely heard after the premiere performances.”²⁴

Perhaps another reason university stage directors often avoid programming new operatic works is a firm belief that the study of works in the standard repertoire is more pedagogically beneficial than studying new compositions. This belief is rightly supported by years of proven results – study of the standard operatic repertoire at the university level obviously prepares students to tackle those same works in a professional setting. Additionally, collegiate opera directors are expected to generate interest in the opera program which often leads to the selection of works that the audience will expectedly enjoy. However, the study of standard repertoire from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries may not sufficiently prepare students to confront works composed after 1950. Pairing scene study of traditional opera with a mini-opera written by a living composer would ensure that student singers and directors are exposed to works from both categories. This is important as professional opera companies produce works from both standard and contemporary repertoire.

²³ David Amos, “The importance of commissioning music,” *SDJewishWorld*, June 17, 2010, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://sdjewishworld.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/the-importance-of-commissioning-music>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Establishing a Criteria Set

The following assessment criteria will be used to draw conclusions about the pedagogic benefits of mini-opera in the university setting with respect to the three case studies included in this dissertation: duration of performance, language, number of roles and corresponding voice types, subject matter, transportability, affordability, and vocal pedagogy. Voice professors and stage directors consider these parameters when choosing solo repertoire and scenes for their students, which make these criteria appropriate for application to mini-opera study at the collegiate level.

Duration of performance: The work should be twenty minutes or less allowing for concentration on musical demands and character development for the singer, or focused attention on believable plot development for the director. The twenty-minute duration was an arbitrary choice.

Language: The work should be in one of the four standard languages studied at the undergraduate level (Italian, German, French, or English) allowing the mini-opera study to supplement the curriculum accepted in most collegiate level performance programs.

Number of roles and voice type: The number of designated roles and their corresponding types should be beneficial, meeting the needs of the university and of current students enrolled in the program.

Transportability: The plot would demand few set pieces or props, allowing for easy load-in, set-up, and tear-down in both traditional and non-traditional venues.

Affordability: The production costs of the work should be minimal. Consider the inability of some collegiate level vocal programs to support the production of large-scale works. The cost of the mini-opera should enable a college or university in this situation to perform complete works, further bolstering the value of performing the work.

Vocal Demands: Several elements should be considered when selecting repertoire for collegiate level singers. These include range, tessitura, melodic and harmonic structure, and the stamina required to successfully execute the music. The same holds true when selecting roles for singers, whether it be in a mini-opera or lengthier opera.

Range encompasses all the notes that the vocal instrument is capable of creating from lowest to highest. A singer tasked with singing a role in which the range is not within the scope of his or her capability may not be able to perform with optimal vocal technique. In an attempt to produce sounds in the extremities of his or her voice, the singer may make ineffective technical choices. The mini-opera should encourage expansion of range with respect to each student's current level of ability but should *not* push the singer too far beyond their collegiate level training.

Tessitura is defined as the general range in which most notes fall in the melodic line of a particular vocal part. Assigning a role with a tessitura that is too low or too high risks potential for vocal fatigue, at a minimum, and more serious long-term vocal health concerns. The tessitura should be within the scope of ability for the young singing actor while offering challenges that stretch the student with respect to individual vocal development.

Both the melodic line and accompanying harmonic structure should be examined when choosing repertoire or roles for singers. The undergraduate singer may be most comfortable performing melodic lines that are predominately conjunct and/or include intervals supported by tonal harmonies. The material found in the mini-operas should supplement the theory and ear-training curriculum in which students are engaged.

CHAPTER III

GARY BELSHAW'S *THE WORST ONE EVER*

Brief Background of Belshaw and *The Worst One Ever*

Dr. Belshaw earned his Bachelor of Music, Master of Music, and Ph.D. at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. He serves on the faculty of Wayland Baptist University teaching both Composition and Orchestration. Dr. Belshaw is the Composer-in-Residence for Plainview Symphony Orchestra. An active pianist, he has performed with the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, Plainview Symphony Orchestra, and has recorded six works for solo piano on a CD titled *American Ivory*.

His compositions have been heard in England, Spain, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, and Russia, and throughout the United States. His march *Oldest and Finest* was premiered by the U.S. Naval Academy Band at their 150th Anniversary Gala and is featured on a CD compilation of band music honoring that prestigious ensemble. Dr. Belshaw has composed for band, brass, harp, piano, woodwinds, and orchestra, and has written works for voice, choral ensemble, and the operatic stage.²⁵

The Worst One Ever was inspired by the real life circumstances of a voice major at Wayland Baptist University. In the face of an upcoming piano proficiency exam, the

²⁵ Gary Belshaw, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, April 27, 2014. Amarillo, Texas, email interview.

voice major endured a high level of stress induced by her relentless need to earn an 'A.' After witnessing her troublesome anxiety, Belshaw made the decision to compose an opera about her situation.

Belshaw met with Department Chair and Director of Birmingham Southern College Opera Jeff Kensmore to explore possible directions for the piece. According to Belshaw, "[Kensmore] pointed out the current trend toward chamber opera: short operas for small forces – that is, casts of five or less – and chorus optional if at all." With that in mind, Belshaw began work on *The Worst One Ever*. The opera premiered at Wayland Baptist University in the spring of 2010. The production has had fifteen subsequent performances since its debut.²⁶

Gary Belshaw's *The Worst One Ever* is a brief peek into the lives of three college undergrads, each one facing what seems to them to be turbulent circumstances. Roles include Stephanie (soprano), Jennifer (mezzo soprano), and Jessica (alto or contralto). In the time span of only ten minutes, Stephanie copes with the anxiety resulting from the pursuit of academic success, Jennifer attempts to navigate the hardships of her romantic relationship, and Jessica deals with the inevitable tension felt between young adults and their guardians when the former are attempting to establish independence.

According to Dr. Jeff Kensmore, "Gary Belshaw's score is very accessible to undergraduate students. It has moments of lyricism, drama, comedy and most importantly for today's young people, it is filled with moments that all young people can

²⁶ Gary Belshaw, *Opera*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera> (accessed May 2, 2014).

relate to: grades, Dads, and misguided boyfriends!”²⁷ The subject matter is easy to relate to for the players on the stage and accessible to the audience as well. Dr. Kensmore continues, “Audiences just love this show! I've gotten more audience response from *The Worst One Ever* than I have from any opera scene I have performed or directed in my 18+ years of working in this genre.”²⁸

Another indication of the topicality of *The Worst One Ever's* subject matter is the continued request for performance rights at the university setting. When asked about the appropriateness of the work for college singers, Belshaw replied, “If anything, I fear it will never be seen as anything else!” He went on to say that he was “thrilled that the universities which have tackled the project have had such incredibly enthusiastic response from cast and audience...I really like the bridge that it seems to create between the world of opera and the “real” world.”²⁹

Criteria Set

Duration of performance

The Worst One Ever is approximately ten minutes and twenty-four seconds in length. Each role has extensive solo passages balanced with ensemble sections.

According to Dr. Arrika Gregory, Director of Opera at Georgia Southern University, *The Worst One Ever* “was a perfect vehicle for three of [her] younger students who had

²⁷ Gary Belshaw, *Performance History: Spring 2010*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera/TWOEHistory.html> (accessed May 2, 2014).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gary Belshaw, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 26, 2014. Amarillo, Texas, email interview.

earned an opportunity more substantial than a scene but weren't quite ready for a longer work.”³⁰

Language

The Worst One Ever is sung in English. The language is not elevated and includes the 21st-century colloquialisms “chick flick,” “Facebook,” and “Luv ya,” combined with somewhat dated terms like “clod” and “stuffed shirts.”

Number of roles and corresponding voice types

The Worst One Ever is scored for three female voices: soprano, mezzo soprano, and alto. In previous performances at the undergraduate level the middle voice was assigned to a soprano and the lowest voice was assigned to a mezzo soprano. A benefit of performing this work in the university setting is that it meets the demands for repertoire highlighting the female voice. After programming *The Worst One Ever*, Northeastern Illinois University’s Opera Director Sasha Gerritson wrote, “I always find it so hard to find suitable repertoire for the tons of girls I have in the opera program.”³¹ Opera directors can find the task of choosing repertoire for a music program particularly difficult when saturated with female voices.

³⁰ Gary Belshaw, *Performance History: Spring 2013*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera/TWOEHistory.html> (accessed May 2, 2014).

³¹ Gary Belshaw, *Performance History: Spring 2014*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera/TWOEHistory.html> (accessed May 2, 2014).

Instrumentation includes a piano or keyboard and a triangle to mimic the sound of a cell phone ring. The composer has suggested that a programmed MIDI device may be used to cue a cell phone ring during the performance in lieu of the triangle.

Transportability

The Worst One Ever has very limited set requirements, making this piece ideal for transportation. Belshaw calls for a bed, table, and two chairs, a laptop, a phone, and snack food. According to Belshaw, “the set can be modified to include a cot, bean bag chair, or whatever may be available.”³² The lack of specificity in set requirements allows for flexibility of production concepts and enables each production to be mounted, disassembled, moved and reassembled very quickly.

Affordability

There is minimal cost to produce *The Worst One Ever*. The rental materials include a Performance Kit containing five piano/vocal scores and the percussion part, accompanied by the licensing agreement. According to Belshaw’s website, the cost for one performance in 2014 was \$150 and each subsequent performance increased the amount incrementally by twenty-five dollars. The low rental cost combined with the minimal set requirements results makes this mini-opera a budget-friendly option for any academic institution.

³² Gary Belshaw, *Performance History: Spring 2014*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera/TWOEHistory.html> (accessed May 2, 2014).

Vocal Demands

Range and Tessitura

Role	Range	Tessitura
Stephanie	E4 to B5	B4 to G5
Jennifer	E4 to G5	G4 to E5
Jessica	C4 to E4	F4 to B4

Figure 1. Gary Belshaw, Range and Tessitura of Roles, *The Worst One Ever*

The melodic lines for each role are primarily conjunct, accented by upper and lower neighbors, escape tones, and leaps of thirds and fourths. Belshaw utilizes tonal harmonies and chord progressions reminiscent of the Baroque. He includes a fugue as well as a specific nod to one of Handel's most well known compositions. This will be addressed in detail in the following section.

Analyzing *The Worst One Ever*: Vocal Technique

I loved how the opera created so many teachable moments. The students had to learn to make character choices, find balance between lovely melodic lines and overlapping conversations, and it was such relevant subject matter for them to draw on real life emotions while holding fast to vocal technique. These building blocks of opera theatre are vital to continue on successfully in this performance medium.

- Crystal Zimmerman, Director, St. Martin's University Opera³³

³³ Gary Belshaw, *Performance History: Spring 2013*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera/TWOEHistory.html> (accessed May 2, 2014).

The singers chosen to present Belshaw's work will be confronted with challenging vocal lines with respect to tessitura and the navigation of vocal registers. According to Clifton Ware, register coordination occurs when "the body and voice tract are properly aligned, all extraneous tensions are eliminated, vocal-fold vibration is coordinately balanced, and adequate breath pressure is applied."³⁴ Each individual role challenges the budding singer to master these concepts in order to navigate register transitions.

The vocal line of the top voice (Stephanie) lies in the upper middle register, a tessitura common to the standard soprano repertoire and, therefore, important for the young singer to master (See Appendix C for information on registers). The role of Stephanie does traverse the soprano's secondo passaggio at F#5 throughout the opera which requires a "discernable shift in energization and vowel modification."³⁵ Likewise, the vocal line of the middle voice (Jennifer) also navigates the secondo passaggio at E5 with respect to the mezzo soprano voice. The tessitura lays in both the lower middle and upper middle register of the voice which "is an area of prime importance for the female singer [for] it is only after she learns how to manage this part of her range that real vocal development begins."³⁶ The vocal line of the lowest voice (Jessica) deals primarily with the primo passaggio, an area of that voice that requires careful attention. According to Richard Miller, F4 is known as the 'Melba point' for mezzo sopranos

³⁴ Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 122.

³⁵ Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26.

³⁶ Barbara M. Doscher, *Functional Unity of the Singing Voice* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc.: 1994), 180.

(sometimes E4; Eb4 for sopranos).³⁷ The 'Melba point' is a pivotal registration point past which chest voice should not be permitted. In his book *Training Soprano Voices*, Miller states that,

The vocal folds are...thickest in the lowest pitches of the voice; as the fundamental rises, the folds engage in the tensing, thinning, and elongating process...Attempting to maintain the mass of the vocal folds while stretching their length during pitch elevation invites imbalances among internal and external laryngeal musculatures, causing hyperfunction in one muscle group and hypofunction in another. In traditional voice pedagogy, this kind of heavy timbre is pejoratively described as 'carrying up chest voice.'...These dicta, enunciated by a great soprano of the not-so-distant past [Melba] and in accordance with historic tradition, are fully supported by modern physical and acoustical evidence.³⁸

Both the soprano and mezzo soprano roles in *The Worst One Ever* are required to execute transitions between passaggi as dictated by the demands of the tessitura for each role. Negotiating these passaggi aids singers in the pursuit of an even singing voice and supports their overall pedagogic development.

The Worst One Ever will supplement ear training for undergraduate singers. For instance, in mm.80-82, Belshaw scores the voices interchangeably on an augmented triad. The singers must tune each eighth-note to maintain the integrity of the augmented triad. This task is made further difficult by the varying texts that require singers to tune conflicting vowels (see Figure 2). There is ample repetition of melodic and harmonic material in *The Worst One Ever*. The repetition of the melodic line

³⁷ Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 215.

³⁸ Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26.

amongst all three roles lends itself to ease of learning and memorization. The repeated harmonic material provides stability and firmly establishes a tonal center for the singers, and the vocal parts are not in harmonic conflict with the piano part.

The image shows a musical score for three voices: Steph., Jen., and Jess. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins at measure 80. The first part of the score is in 3/8 time, and the second part is in 2/4 time. The lyrics for each voice are: Steph. "post those grades; post those grades; post those grades!", Jen. "take me out; take me out; take me out!", and Jess. "tell me 'Yes;'" tell me 'Yes;'" tell me 'Yes!'". The music consists of simple, repetitive melodic lines for each voice.

Figure 2. Gary Belshaw, mm. 80-82, *The Worst One Ever*
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There is ample repetition of melodic and harmonic material in *The Worst One Ever*. The repetition of the melodic line amongst all three roles lends itself to ease of learning and memorization. The repeated harmonic material provides stability and firmly establishes a tonal center for the singers, and the vocal parts are not in harmonic conflict with the piano part.

Despite the tonal harmonies and repeated melodic material, the singers' ear-training skills will be tested in two major polyphonic sections. The first passage begins in m. 338 and continues through m. 370. Each voice simultaneously sings thematic material from their solo passages as seen below in Figure 3. These independent lines

weave in and out of one another; the cross-voicing is certainly challenging for developing ears. Not only must singers focus carefully on tuning, they must also determine the harmonic function of their part throughout, whether they primary or secondary, and execute appropriate dynamics.

347

Steph. get an "A". Got-ta have, got - ta have that "A"! Come on; post those

Jen. I don't know who he thinks he is, but he's kil - ling me. No more life - less

Jess. He's got-ta learn to trust me; Dad, please— let me go! Dad, give

Figure 3. Gary Belshaw, mm. 347-350, *The Worst One Ever*
 copyright MMX © 2010 by Gary D. Belshaw Music
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The second polyphonic section is a fugue found in mm. 434-448 set to the text, “he’s the best one ever.” The fugue rises in pitch level until the passage reaches the climactic statement that includes a small excerpt from Handel’s famous “Hallelujah” chorus (Figure 4). The familiarity of these Baroque sonorities and the unapologetic use of Handel’s most famous chorus will be instantly relatable to most audiences. Such musical quotations demonstrate how, as Belshaw notes, “The music is accessible for

undergraduates to learn and be able to perform at a high level, and is also very accessible musically for audiences less familiar with opera.”³⁹

Soprano 1
best, he's the best_one ev - er, and ev - er, Hal - le lu - jah,

Soprano 2
best, he's the best_one ev - er, and ev - er, Hal - le lu - jah,

Soprano 3
he's the best_one ev - - - er, and ev - er, Hal - le lu - jah,

Figure 4. Gary Belshaw, mm. 445-448, *The Worst One Ever*
copyright MMX © 2010 by Gary D. Belshaw Music
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Belshaw also cleverly includes a dramatic convention found in many of opera’s most loved works: the mad scene. In *The Worst One Ever*, Belshaw composes a brief mad scene for Stephanie in mm. 88 – 155. The escalation into madness is driven primarily by text. Belshaw utilizes score markings to dictate specific stage directions; these notify the singer that her anger is rising. For instance, in mm. 151-155, Stephanie is instructed by the composer to raise her laptop with the intent of throwing it on the floor. This scripted action is intended to show Stephanie’s loss of composure.

Belshaw states that the mad scene is in ABA form. “The A material, the first theme, is egocentric, all about [Stephanie’s] torment. The B material, on a different pitch center, is almost apoplectic, venting the impatient anger that comes from having

³⁹ Gary Belshaw, *Performance History: Fall 2013*, <http://www.garydbelshawmusic.com/Opera/TWOEHistory.html> (accessed May 2, 2014).

even been placed in her conflict."⁴⁰ The A section is identified by Stephanie's thematic music (Figure 5) in e minor which sits primarily at the bottom of the staff.

The image shows a musical score for four parts: Stephanie (Steph.), Jen, Jess, and Trgl. (Trumpet), and a piano accompaniment. The score is in e minor and includes lyrics for Stephanie's part. The piano part is marked *mf* and features a melodic line primarily at the bottom of the staff. The lyrics for Stephanie are: "Got-ta get, got-ta get an 'A'; Got-ta have, got-ta have that 'A'." The score is numbered 89-92 and includes a box with the number 8.

Figure 5. Gary Belshaw, mm. 89-92, *The Worst One Ever*
copyright MMX © 2010 by Gary D. Belshaw Music
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The B section is characterized by alternating dynamics between *mf* and *f* and the melodic line sits primarily at the top of the staff (Figure 6). Over the course of sixty-seven measures, Stephanie loses her composure when faced with the prospect that she may not receive an A, resulting in the presumed loss of her mother's love.

⁴⁰ Gary Belshaw, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 26, 2014. Amarillo, Texas, email interview.

108 *f* 10 *mf*

Steph. Who does he think he is? Why can't he post those grades? All my work is

Jen.

Jess.

Trgl.

f 10 *p*

113

Steph. al - ways per - fect, well, near - ly al - ways... Who does he think he is?

Jen.

Jess.

Trgl.

f

Figure 6. Gary Belshaw, mm. 108-117, *The Worst One Ever*
 copyright MMX © 2010 by Gary D. Belshaw Music
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Although not indicated by the composer, a case for a second mad scene may be made. The mezzo soprano role, Jennifer, seems to have the most severe reaction to her

situation. Unable to get her way, Jennifer becomes so agitated with her boyfriend that she sings, “He’s so gonna get it. I don’t’ know who he thinks he is, but he’s DEAD.”

Perhaps this is the strongest example of the pain-induced delirium often associated with the conventional mad scene. While the reaction seems maniacal, such is the nature of the traditional mad scene.

An argument can certainly be made that young undergraduate singers should not be encouraged or permitted to confront the rigors of Lucia’s crazed scene ‘Il dolce suono mi colpì di sua voce...Spargi d’amaro pianot,’ simply due to the aria’s dramatic requirements and the vocal technique that 19th-century *bel canto* singing demands. Nor should they seek to conquer Ophelia or Anna Bolena prematurely. Belshaw’s work offers young singers a taste of a mini-mad scene while also supplying the audience with a theatrical moment familiar from several works in the standard repertoire.

Other pedagogic considerations include precise articulation of the English diction. The text is syllabic; most of the textual phrases are set to eighth and sixteenth notes requiring that singers execute quick articulation of consonant sounds. Careful attention should be paid to words that may be heard infrequently in daily conversation such as “clod” or “stuffed-shirts.” Likewise, there is an innate humor found in the use of the colloquial phrases “luv ya,” and “chick flick,” as well as references to Facebook. The language was carefully selected with the intent of creating an opera that is current and easy for audiences to relate to. Singers should take care with these words so that the audience does not miss jovial moments in the score.

Conclusions

Dr. Gary Belshaw's *The Worst One Ever* is a suitable mini-opera for colleges and universities because the work meets several needs of their corresponding music departments. First, the setting is appropriate as it takes place in a dorm room. Second, the work is performed in English and highlights the female voice. Third, the work is affordable and can be produced in nearly any venue due to the limited set requirements. Fourth, and perhaps most important, *The Worst One Ever* poses pedagogic challenges that may positively impact the technical growth of the undergraduate level singer.

Lastly, Belshaw cleverly includes dramatic conventions in *The Worst One Ever* that are found in the standard repertoire. The character responses in *The Worst One Ever* are intended to be absurd; moreover they are intended to parallel the absurdity of mad scenes found in the standard repertoire. Thus this mini-opera is a learning tool that encourages students to find dramatic links between common circumstance and the heightened reactions often required in opera.

For some audiences, the reactions of Belshaw's characters may not project a positive image of women. Each girl has an overreaction to her circumstances and, while this is expected in the case of a mad scene, these overreactions may drive the stereotype that all girls are overly emotional or hysterical. Additionally, Belshaw includes stage directions that require the characters to eat snacks in an attempt to deal with their circumstances. This does feed into the gender stereotype that females' initial

response to a bad situation is the consumption of food for emotional comfort. The characters' exaggerated reactions, combined with their incessant need to eat as a response to stress, may result in questions of gender stereotyping. This does present an opportunity to engage students in an important and relevant discussion about gender roles in all operatic repertoire. Singers are frequently asked to play roles to which they cannot relate; the characters and libretti in many historical operas may express attitudes towards women that are considered offensive to contemporary audiences. Part of our human development, both on and off the stage, is learning to understand the motivations and intent of others. *The Worst One Ever* will only serve to support that development.

CHAPTER IV

STEVE COHEN'S *LA PIZZA DEL DESTINO*

Brief Background of Cohen and *La Pizza del Destino*

Steve Cohen received his musical training at the Manhattan School of Music, Eastman School of Music, and the Juilliard School of Music. Cohen has composed works for chamber ensemble, concert band, orchestra, sacred and secular works for voice, and sacred and secular works for choral ensemble. His choral music has been performed by the Zamir Chorale, Zemel Choir of London, and the Gregg Smith Singers, and has been heard at the North American Jewish Choral Festival. In addition to his choral music and solo vocal music, Cohen has composed two operas: *La Pizza del Destino* and *The Cop and The Anthem*.

Cohen has received several awards for his compositions including the Composer's Award (West Virginia Symphony Orchestra), Shalsholet Festival Awards, Susan Galloway Sacred Song Award, and the Aeros Prize.⁴¹

While studying composition with John Corigliano at Manhattan School of Music, Steve Cohen followed Corigliano's recommendation and provided incidental music for William M. Hoffman's play *Gilles de Rais*. During his work on *Gilles de Rais*, a group of

⁴¹ Steve Cohen, *Biography*, <http://www.stevecohenmusic.net/biography> (accessed March 13, 2014).

cast members approached Cohen about the possibility of composing music for *Heavy Confetti*, a revue put on by the Orion Repertory Company. The director of *Heavy Confetti* asked Cohen to contribute a new work that would feature an operatic soprano in the company. Cohen agreed and met with another playwright, Joseph Renard. In 1975, Cohen met with Renard at Phebe's bar in New York City to discuss potential concepts for the work. In the course of one evening, the two had cooked up the idea for *La Pizza del Destino*, a brief operatic skit about the creation of a pizza, with Renard

La Pizza del Destino tells a simple story – the making of a pizza pie. The action occurs inside a pizza parlor owned by Joe, the pie maker. As the plot develops, the audience is introduced to Maria, Joe's wife, and Mamma, the family matriarch. Essentially, this mini-opera provides an inside view into the triangular relationship of Joe, Maria, and Mamma as they relate to daily life. Many American audiences would readily be able to relate to the characters and family dynamics in Cohen's work.

When asked about the work's appropriateness for university opera programs, Cohen responded, "regardless of what I think, I'm constantly getting inquiries from colleges about the opera, so it must be suitable."⁴² Throughout the piece, the three characters sing about potential ingredients for the pizza pies. They propose common foods such as pepperoni, mozzarella, and funghi. The last ingredient, suggested by Mamma, is marijuana. According to Cohen, "there are some schools where the mention of marijuana in the finale is deemed to be potentially controversial, and I've sanctioned

⁴² Steve Cohen, *Biography*, <http://www.stevecohenmusic.net/biography> (accessed March 13, 2014).

a cut to skip over this section. Most of the time the line stays, which is good because it's probably the biggest laugh in the piece."⁴³ If the institution would require the removal of the word "marijuana," Cohen would authorize the performance of the abridged version.

Criteria Set

Duration of performance

La Pizza del Destino lasts roughly ten minutes. According to Cohen, "the length [of the mini-opera] was dictated by the length of the entire review."⁴⁴ The comedic undertone of *La Pizza del Destino* was inspired by "TV variety shows such as Sid Caesar or Carol Burnett, or Warner Brothers cartoons such as 'The Rabbit of Seville' or 'What's Opera, Doc?'"⁴⁵

Language

The ease with which the Italian libretto was written can be attributed to the unconventional way in which language is utilized in this mini-opera. The libretto is comprised of a few familiar Italian words (i.e. pizza, con tutti, mozzarella) strung together to make phrases of repeated text. For example, in Joe's initial entrance, he sings 'pizza, pizza, pizza' repeatedly. While 'pizza' has an indisputable singular definition,

⁴³ Steve Cohen, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, February 11, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Skype interview.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the meaning of the word changes through the progression of the section. The audience should discover the meaning of Joe's repeated text through Cohen's musical clues and the actors' internal motivations, outwardly displayed through gestures and vocal inflection. The use of language will be discussed further in the analyses portion of this chapter.

Number of roles and corresponding voice types

La Pizza del Destino has three characters, Joe (baritone), Maria (soprano) and Mamma (countertenor), and an ensemble. As aforementioned the original purpose of this composition was to feature the vocal prowess of a classically trained soprano. "Maria was played by a true operatic soprano who was a regular soloist at the Amato Opera," says Cohen, "so I wrote to her abilities, including that big, long high C at the end."⁴⁶ This part may be best suited to a graduate level singer or an upper level undergraduate female nearing the end of her degree. The baritone role should be manageable for an undergraduate male as Joseph Renard, an untrained singer, originally sang the part. Lastly, we have the role of Mamma, which was composed for countertenor. "Mamma is probably the toughest role to cast, as that was tailored specifically to the unusual skill set of a very flamboyant drag performer named Jeffrey Herman."⁴⁷ Not only must the countertenor be in command of his instrument, he should

⁴⁶ Steve Cohen, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, February 11, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Skype interview.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

also have a charismatic presence and an attitude of commitment to the role. Just as mezzo sopranos who step into a pants role, this countertenor must take on the mannerisms of a strong-willed female character that most certainly will serve as a comedic focal point.

Transportability

This piece requires very few set pieces; a counter, pizza boxes, and supplies to make a pizza pie: dough, cheese, and pepperoni. Unless the stage is properly covered, it may be wise to avoid the use of flour and red sauce. When considering costuming, pieces may include stereotypical items including a chef's hat, aprons, and red and white-checked garments. Outside of these items, the set and costumes require very little effort or coordination to load in, set up, and strike. *La Pizza del Destino* would be an optimal production choice.

Affordability

Rental costs for Cohen's mini-opera are flexible based on venue size, number of performances, and choice of orchestration (either the fully orchestrated score or a piano reduction). The production will accrue very little cost for universities, as it requires minimal rehearsal time, minimal set pieces and few properties. As discussed, costumes may include aprons for the three leads and a chef's hat for Joe. Beyond these

requirements, both leads and ensemble can be outfitted in street attire, once again resulting in lower production cost.

Vocal Demands

Range and tessitura

Role	Range	Tessitura
Joe	G2 to D4	C3 to B3
Maria	Bb3 to C6	A4 to G5
Mamma	D3 to B4	G3 to C4

Figure 7. Steve Cohen, Range and Tessitura of Roles, *La Pizza del Destino*

This piece requires three lead performers with a solid command of technique, perhaps upper level undergraduates or graduate students. Cohen points out that *La Pizza del Destino* is “very deliberately a pastiche of traditional operatic styles, particularly Mozart and Rossini,”⁴⁸ and this can be seen in the vocal lines. For example, in Mamma’s brief aria, Cohen utilizes ascending and descending sequences reminiscent of the Classical period. The sequencing leads to a Rossini inspired cadenza (Figure 8) to showcase the vocal abilities of the countertenor.

⁴⁸ Steve Cohen, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, February 11, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Skype interview

3. Aria — 8 — **La Pizza Del Destino**

Maestoso (♩=60)

101 Mamma

Sal-sa— di po - mo - do - ro, Sal - sa— di po - mo - do - ro, di po - mo-

sfpp *sfpp* *p*

105 Mamma

do - ro, di po-mo - do - ro, di po - mo - do - ro!

Liberamente, quasi cadenza

Figure 8. Steve Cohen, mm. 101-108, *La Pizza del Destino*
 copyright © 1975, 1998 by Steve Cohen and Joseph Renard
 all rights reserved – used by permission

Throughout the mini-opera, leads encounter leaps outlining triadic harmony including those as large as an octave. Singers are also confronted with several ascending and descending scalar melodic lines that transverse register events. They are also expected to execute trills. As for the ensemble, Cohen kept the music “as simple as possible; lots of unison and very basic counterpoint in two voices.”⁴⁹ The ensemble parts should be well within the grasp of those just beginning the vocal programs at the college level.

⁴⁹ Steve Cohen, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, February 11, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Skype interview.

Analyzing *La Pizza del Destino*: Acting Technique

In *La Pizza del Destino*, Renard wrote only twenty-one words or phrases that are repeated throughout the mini-opera (Figure 9⁵⁰). The actors must display clear intent to make these twenty-one words and phrases evoke different meanings throughout the piece. Without these shifts in intent, the plot would become stagnant. Renard's unique approach to language (i.e. the repetition of text used to communicate changing feelings) is similar to a common Method acting exercise inspired by Stanislavsky and developed by Strasberg.⁵¹

Acting students are asked to replace known words with nonsensical consonant and vowel combinations and still assert their motivational intent. A pair of actors attempts to convey and receive messages whilst speaking in gibberish. The desired outcome is each respective student's increased ability to send and receive the intent behind the verbal communication. Essentially, *La Pizza del Destino* is a ten minute and thirty second exercise in communication for the singers and the audience. "The text and action of this piece are minimal – Joe Renard wrote the entire text of the libretto on a cocktail napkin! - so it's up to the director and the performers to find and impart shades of meaning in the repeated words, and create comic business."⁵² The repetition of pizza-related words is an example of the parody of the Italian *bel canto* style, highlighting the absurdity of textual repetition of this nature.

⁵⁰ Misspellings of the Italian text are included in the score

⁵¹ Ed Kovens *The Method Manual: For Teachers and Actors* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press Inc., 2006), 46-47.

⁵² Steve Cohen, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, February 11, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Skype interview.

Pizza	Aspetta	Pepperoni
Pizzeria	Un momento	E salsicce
Mamma mia	Il pubblico	Hey
Che portare?	Buon giorno	Parmigiana
Salsa di pomodoro	Che cosa vuole?	Melanzani
Mozzarella	(Pizza) con tutti	Capolina
Oregano	Funghi	Marijuana

Figure 9. Steve Cohen and Joseph Renard, Libretto Text, *La Pizza del Destino*
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The singers should use Cohen’s harmonic progressions and dynamics to influence their dramatic choices. For example, in m. 58, there is an abrupt shift from A major to A minor (Figure 8). This major/minor shift is another parody of 19th century *bel canto* operatic conventions. The shift should signal a change in intention for the singer playing the role of Joe. Perhaps he has realized that he is missing a key ingredient in his pizza pie-making process; or maybe he has forgotten his prized apron and chef hat. Whatever the choice may be it should reflect the shift to the minor sonority.

Figure 10. Steve Cohen, mm. 54-61, *La Pizza del Destino*
 copyright © 1975, 1998 by Steve Cohen and Joseph Renard
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Another musical moment the singers should investigate is mm. 84-86 (Figure 9).

The music suggests a delightful camaraderie between Joe and Maria. Joe sings “pizza” on an A major scale and is immediately answered by Maria’s Bb major scale. Joe replies with yet another scale, this time a half step higher on B major. The major sonority combined with the repeated ascending scales may suggest a happy link between the characters, perhaps even escalating contentment as Joe and Maria continue to enjoy one another’s company.

84

Maria
Piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz - ze - ri - a! Piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz-za,

Joe
Piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz - ze - ri - a! Piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz-za, piz - ze - ri - a!—

Figure 11. Steve Cohen, mm. 84-86, *La Pizza del Destino*
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Mamma's arioso provides another excellent opportunity to use Cohen's musical cues to influence dramatic choices. Unlike the entrance music for Joe and Maria, the *maestoso* at m. 101 brings Mamma on stage in theatrical fashion (Figure 6 above). Her melodic content is supported by tremolos and sforzando crescendos and decrescendos. Mamma completes her opening statement with a *bel canto*-inspired cadenza marked *liberamente* meaning 'with liberty' or 'freely.' As Mamma's arioso continues the *larghetto* tempo aptly prepares the singer to weep through mm. 109-117 (Figure 10). The singing actor must choose what is causing the musical lament here. Perhaps she is feigning grief to garner the attention of her son or maybe she hopes to gain sympathy so that she can easily sway Joe and Maria to let her choose the ingredients for the day's

pizza pies. No matter the choice, all actors should heed Cohen's musical cues and respond accordingly.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "La Pizza del Destino" by Steve Cohen, covering measures 109 to 117. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 109-111) is a piano introduction marked "Larghetto (♩ = 72)" and "p, doloroso". It features a treble clef with a melodic line containing triplets and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment of chords. The second system (measures 112-114) is a vocal line for "Mamma" with lyrics "Di po - mo -". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar chordal texture. The third system (measures 115-117) is another vocal line for "Mamma" with lyrics "do - ro, po - mo - do - ro, po - mo - do - ro, po - mo - do - ro, po - mo - do - ro! Di po - mo -". The piano accompaniment is marked "p" and features a more active bass line with eighth notes.

Figure 12. Steve Cohen, mm. 109-117, *La Pizza del Destino*
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Clear depiction of character is vital to the successful presentation of *La Pizza del Destino* making this mini-opera a good learning tool for student singers enrolled in university opera programs. According to Cohen, the three roles in *La Pizza del Destino* were fashioned after stereotypes and should be easily recognized by the actors and the audience.⁵³ The characters should evoke a memory or image in the minds of the audience, one that conjures mental pictures of a burly Italian man with Mafioso mannerisms, a passionate Italian woman with a romantic disposition, and an overbearing Italian mother with unapologetic opinions. The relational dynamics between these characters should be easily perceived, perhaps even predicted by both the players and the audience members.

Learning to develop a character type is a necessary skill for operatic performers, particularly when figuring out how to make a role your own in the face of two hundred years of iconic performances. One might think of Bizet's *Carmen*, for example: the audience expects *Carmen* to be a certain way even before the curtain has risen, sultry, confident, and passionate. However, each mezzo soprano cast as *Carmen* must make personal choices about the character's back-story so that her personal interpretation is distinctive and memorable. The same concept applies to the actors in Cohen's mini-opera.

One of the most difficult aspects of acting in Cohen's mini-opera is effective command of comedic performance. The performers may be tempted to exaggerate

⁵³ Steve Cohen, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, February 11, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Skype interview.

gestures and expressions, hoping to inspire laughter in the audience. In Leon Major's "The Empty Voice," Major states that "many young performers and even many experienced ones, think that the way to *be* funny is to *do* something funny, to act absurdly in order to show absurdity. This, they think, will get them their laugh. Nothing could be further from the truth." He states "timing, word emphasis, and rhythm are the tools that make comedy succeed."⁵⁴ Singers in *La Pizza del Destino* must be committed to honest intentions, trusting that the result will be sincere reactions apparent in their gestures and facial expressions. The comedy is situational, woven into the mini-opera by Cohen and Renard. The inherent humor will develop naturally through the rehearsal process as the players spend time developing the characters' relationships.

Conclusions

Steve Cohen's *La Pizza del Destino* is an ideal mini-opera for colleges and universities because the work challenges young actors to rely solely on their abilities to convey honest intentions. In order to do so, students will be expected to deliver clear communication through their use of diction, inflection, and gestures. In addition, mastering the comedic elements found in Cohen's mini-opera should prepare students for those they will undoubtedly encounter when singing in a Mozart or Rossini opera. Additionally, this mini-opera is a useful vehicle to discuss musical elements of operatic works in the *bel canto* repertoire. *La Pizza del Destino* will aid in the development of

⁵⁴ Leon Majors, *The Empty Voice: Acting Opera* (Milwaukee, WI: Amadeus Press, 2011), 112.

students' acting technique and prepare them to successfully perform a role in a larger work from the standard repertoire.

CHAPTER V

JEREMY BECK'S *REVIEW*

Brief Background of Beck and *Review*

Jeremy Beck (b. 1960-) has earned multiple degrees in Composition: a Bachelor of Science from The Mannes College of Music, a Master of Arts from Duke University, and both a Master of Musical Arts and Doctor of Musical Arts from the Yale School of Music. Beck also holds a law degree from the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville. He has received numerous awards for his compositions and his works have been presented by New York City Opera, the National Opera Association, American Composers Orchestra, the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Center for Contemporary Opera, Peabody Opera, Yale Opera, and the Dallas Festival of Modern Music, among others. Formerly a tenured professor of composition and music theory at the University of Northern Iowa and California State University-Fullerton, he now practices entertainment, copyright and trademark law in Louisville, Kentucky.

Jeremy Beck has composed for orchestra, chamber ensemble, voice, and opera (*Review*, *The Biddle Boys and Mrs. Soffel*, *Laughter in Jericho*, and *The Highway*). His compositions have been released on six CDs that were favorably reviewed by

*Gramophone, NewMusicBox, MusicWe-International, Audiophile Audition, and the San Francisco Chronicle.*⁵⁵

Jeremy Beck was commissioned by Long Leaf Opera Festival co-founder Benjamin Keaton to compose a work for the North Carolina company. After discussing several proposals, Beck was most intrigued by a short satirical piece written by Patricia Marx for *The New Yorker*.⁵⁶ As he put it in a personal interview with this author, “I was immediately attracted to the possibility of setting this piece for a number of reasons: it is written in dialogue; it is short; and – most importantly – it is funny. Much of my stage work is dramatic and dark, and the idea of composing a comedic piece was especially inviting.”⁵⁷ With the intent to compose a work that would be short and snappy, Beck began work on Marx’s piece; *Review* was finished in 2009.⁵⁸

Review depicts a lively conversation between seven people that occurs during a small gathering. At the party, the guests take time to review life. The action of the mini-opera is circular, meaning that the plot does not move decidedly forward. The first six players do not seem to have motivations specific to their individual characters. It is not until the arrival of a seventh character, Mrs. Kimball, that we encounter a recognizable goal: to discover life’s truths. Mrs. Kimball has just died from surgical complications

⁵⁵ Jeremy Beck, *Biography*, <http://www.beckmusic.org/biography> (accessed March 6, 2014).

⁵⁶ Patricia Marx, “Review,” *The New Yorker*, August 4, 2003, 35.

⁵⁷ Jeremy Beck, interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 19, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

when she enters the scene. At this point the audience may realize that the gathering is taking place in Hell; thus, the nature of the piece takes a marked turn.

The subject of the mini-opera is a conversation, the type in which we may all find ourselves involved during the course of our lives; a superficial discussion in which one might engage during a party or gathering with an unfamiliar group of people. The conversation itself is circular, without a specific beginning or an end; the topics discussed are often irrelevant, futile and indefinite. The pervading theme is a review of life – what was appreciated and what was not. Some topics include the weather, colors, the guest list (i.e. Earth’s inhabitants), and Mia Farrow’s many “good” husbands. There are brief moments of serious inquiry, particularly when Mrs. Kimball joins the party and asks if there is, indeed, a God. However, the majority of the conversational exchange is amusing, frivolous, and pointless, adding to the circular nature of this mini-opera. Despite the seemingly directionless dialogue, the director should encourage the actors to discover internal motivations behind each of their respective statements to assist in the continuity of the work. Directors should encourage the actors to develop personal back-stories for their individual characters to aid in the discovery of internal motivation.

Criteria Set

Duration

The performance length of the mini-opera is roughly fifteen minutes. Six of the seven characters are on stage for the entire show. The seventh, Mrs. Kimball, joins the conversation in the latter half of the mini-opera.

Language

The libretto of *Review* is taken in its entirety directly from Patricia Marx's piece published in *The New Yorker*. To maintain the integrity and sensibility of Marx's satire, Beck composed the opera in English as penned by Marx. There are several pop culture references in Marx's writing, including nods to Rod McKuen and Mia Farrow.

Number of roles and corresponding voice types

There are seven roles in *Review*, only one of which has a name. The roles are Sopranos I and II, Soprano III (aka Mrs. Kimball), Mezzo, Tenors I and II, and Baritone. Every player has equal stage time. Beck opted not to name the characters so as to thwart listeners' tendency to make assumptions about character from particular names. The exclusion of actual names thus opens the door to seemingly endless possibilities for the various characters, making for an adventurous, non-restrictive exploration of the work for both the director and actors. Perhaps the only unnamed role with defined characteristics is that of the Baritone. According to Beck, the Baritone "keeps [the

audience] focused after certain distractions. He provides the through-part; he is the grounding for the progress of the piece. [This role] requires someone who can command authority.”⁵⁹

Transportability

As with our first two case studies, *Review* is an easily transportable mini-opera because it does not require a grandiose set or even any set at all. As has been the case with previous productions, the director may choose to present the piece in a set and with properties one would find at a party, formal or not. Regardless of the director’s final decisions, *Review* is easily adaptable to the needs of individual college or university opera program. It should be noted that although a chamber orchestra accompaniment is available for *Review*, it has been successfully performed with piano alone. Performances with piano also allow for flexibility in the venue where the work may be presented.

Affordability

According to the composer, the grand rights license fee and rental costs for *Review* are variable and negotiable, based in part on the size of the venue, the number of performances, and whether the production will be with piano alone or with chamber orchestra (1011/1110/perc/pno/strgs).

⁵⁹ Jeremy Beck, interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 23, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

Vocal Demands

Range and Tessitura

Role	Range	Tessitura
Soprano I	A3 to A#5	B4 to G5
Soprano II	C4 to G5	G4 to E5
Soprano III (Mrs. Kimball)	A3 to F#5	E4 to E5
Mezzo	G3 to F#5	C4 to D5
Tenor I	C3 to A4	F3 to G4
Tenor II	C3 to A4	F3 to G4
Baritone	A2 to D#4	Bb2 to C4

Figure 13. Jeremy Beck, Range and Tessitura of Roles, *Review*

The vocal lines are rhythmically active, and involve lively syncopation and various sixteenth-note patterns. This approach encourages the swift, forward motion of the music and the interaction of the characters. The majority of the text is set syllabically with melodic lines that are both linear and non-linear, depending on context. And while the melodic content may be at times comprised of large leaps, appoggiaturas, escape tones, and chromaticism, the vocal parts are often fully supported by melodic and tonal

references in the accompaniment. “On a more general level and broadly speaking,” says Beck, “my melodic and harmonic language reflects a type of American tonal dialect.”⁶⁰

As evidenced in *Review*, the slower passages in Beck’s music are lyrical while faster passages are “lively and syncopated, the rhythm deriving from an American sensibility and the reality of having grown up equally surrounded by influences from Western art music (traditional and contemporary), American jazz, and rock or other popular music. (Figure 14).”⁶¹ There are moments when the singers sing independently of the accompaniment (Figure 14) or when the piano is scarce; other times, the accompaniment is full and supportive (Figure 15). The complexity of the melodic lines and rhythms requires thoughtful preparation on the part of the singer. This piece may be best suited to upper level undergraduate singers or those studying at the graduate level.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Beck, interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 19, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

⁶¹ Ibid.

11

cresc. poco a poco

mf

Sop. I
o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

Sop. II
o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver? The

Mez.
o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

Ten. I
This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

Ten. II
This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

Bari.
This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

cresc. poco a poco

mf

S.
o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

A.
o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

T.
This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

B.
This is great! When will it be o - ver? This is great! When will it be o - ver?

Pno.
mf

Figure 14. Jeremy Beck, mm. 62-64, *Review*
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one set in a grand ballroom and the other set at a Halloween costume party. Both choices accommodate the conversational aspect of the libretto.

Another successful production recently took place at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. The director chose to costume the players in white, placing them in a stark, sparsely decorated space with contemporary set pieces.⁶³ Rather than providing the audience with visual distractions, the colorless set and costumes directed its attention to the words of the mini-opera (which were also projected as super-titles for that production). Soprano Carol Coleson (Mrs. Kimball in the OSU production) felt that the black and white color theme forced the actors to choose whether they were good (white) or bad (black) while they were living on earth. She felt this adding a deeper level of connection to the story.⁶⁴

By way of contrast, Oberlin Conservatory produced *Review* in a non-conventional performance space with great success. The director opted to place the singers inside a functioning coffee shop, “The Cat in the Cream,” disguising the players as everyday customers of the shop.⁶⁵ Although the patrons expected a performance, they were not aware of who would be singing in the mini-opera. As the various singers rose from within the general audience to sing on cue in their various locations around the coffee

⁶³ Carol Coleson, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, September 18, 2014. West Palm Beach, Florida, email interview.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Beck, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 19, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

shop, the performance became an unexpected operatic event that exposed the public to an art form that they may not have otherwise experienced.

As Beck has stated, the show's possible design concepts are numerous and limited only by the director's imagination. In the same respect, actors should be open to their own endless possibilities. In *Review*, characters are not assigned to a specific time period, unless required by the director. There are seven distinct persons on stage, none of whom need to have been related in life, and all of whom could be from different historical time periods. This aspect of the composition presents a unique pedagogic tool through which a director and the actors can learn more about their craft.

The variant historical possibilities for character backgrounds would require the director to engage in extensive research to aid the actors in delivering accurate depictions of diverse time periods. Thorough research is a tool that the budding director will employ in most, if not all, future productions. For example, directors might consider the issue of historical etiquette, which, Mark Ross Clark notes, "relates to the character and environment of a historical period."⁶⁶ Clark asserts that the student will add a level of authenticity to a character if the student studies the etiquette from the particular period when the character would have been living.⁶⁷ *Review* affords the director the opportunity to stage characters from varying eras at one time, each with their own social practices and expectations.

⁶⁶ Mark Ross Clark, *Singing, Acting, and Movement in Opera* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 48.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

The only component by which directorial choices are bound is the ultimate discovery that the action takes place in Hell. The composer does point out that a blatant depiction of Hell should be avoided. The audience doesn't need to know that the players are having reflective conversations in Hades.⁶⁸ And while the composer is open to the creative ideas of the director, he does hope that the relationships between the characters are preserved, maintaining the integrity of the mini-opera's libretto. Additional spoken phrases should not be erroneously interjected into the work.⁶⁹

The libretto dictates that all characters are equally important; however, the director must decide where to direct the attention of the audience throughout the mini-opera. The director must learn "to hold the whole picture of what the audience will see in [his or her] head...[to] imagine what the audience will be looking at frame by frame."⁷⁰ Not only does the director have to contend with continuously shifting focal points, but also he or she has to manage disjunct, non-linear conversations that must gel into a cohesive, comprehensible storyline. According to the composer, "a lot happens moment to moment. The director must address each of these mini-events in order to maintain the energy and flow of the piece."⁷¹ With his or her guidance, the singers develop unique characters that operate independently of one another while simultaneously functioning as a single unit within the context of the piece.

⁶⁸ Jeremy Beck, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 23, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theater* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 4.

⁷¹ Jeremy Beck, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 19, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

Review is musically divided into several sections that create aural interest and drive the plot forward. For Beck, “it was important to create certain aural signposts along the way; the piece is not through-composed. Rather, one can hear various returning musical fragments, accompaniments, motives, or “mini songs” that serve to help identify characters, situations, related texts, or a common general attitude.”⁷² These aural signposts serve as a guide for the director, pointing him or her to shifts in a character’s intent or to a general change in the mood of the ensemble.

For example, when Tenor II sings somewhat pretentiously about “colors,” the music in mm. 137-145 is lyrical and sentimental. That same accompanimental idea returns in mm. 178-182 (Figure 16) to underscore Tenor II’s return to the forefront, this time singing the praises of running “errands.” The composer uses and reserves this particular musical context as a way to unify the sense of Tenor II’s underlying character.

⁷² Jeremy Beck, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 19, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

Ten. II *mf* I felt there could have been more col - ors. Not hues - pri - ma - ry
 Bari. *mf* What a - bout na - ture?
 Pno. *f* *mf* *mp*

Ten. II col - ors. They could've come up with a fourth one, some - thing sort of... bright drab.
 Pno. *f* *mf* *mp*

Ten. II *mf* I en - joyed er - raads; did an - y - one else? And I got most of them
 Pno. *f* *mf*

subito Moderato (♩ = c. 76)
 subito Moderato (♩ = c. 76)

Figure 16. Jeremy Beck, mm. 136-145 and mm. 177-181, *Review*
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In addition, when the actors join vocal forces and sing as an ensemble, the music is often percussive, defined by syncopation and repetition of melodic and textual material. This first may be seen in mm. 43-49, where the octave unison singing also

During these measures, the action should be focused and direct so as to in align with the composer's musical intentions.

In addition to these declamatory sections, there are other points where Beck unifies the ensemble through unison voicing. The composer is drawing the text into sharp auditory focus in these instances. Stage action here should be deliberate and exclude gestures or movement across the stage that may pull the attention of the audience away from the text. Figure 12 above provides an example of one such instance.

In melodic unison, the ensemble collectively asks the question, "Did he have a mustache?" Prior to this passage, the group had been discussing the Earth's population, noting that perhaps there should have been nametags to identify each of the planet's six billion people. Soprano II is then inspired to ask the group if anyone has ever met "that guy from Philadelphia." In turn, the ensemble collectively asks the question, "Did he have a mustache?" If the director executes staging that is distracting from the text in any way, he or she would miss an opportunity for humor – if there are six billion people in the world, how could they all possibly know that one guy from Philadelphia?

Conclusions

Jeremy Beck's *Review* is a model production for a student director to develop skills necessary for the successful direction of works in the standard repertoire. The director will be challenged to deal with seven equally important characters that function

as individuals while simultaneously functioning as a singular ensemble unit. He or she must learn to direct the action in such a way as to highlight individual roles when necessary but then effectively direct focus to the ensemble as its own unit.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the work is the nature of the libretto. Because the conversation is circular, there is not always a goal; without a goal in mind, the characters will not be motivated to action; and without action, we lack a plot. The seven characters in the piece do not follow the typical rules of plot development – “they do not have a dramatic arc because [the characters] are frozen in time and place, without change.”⁷³ This would pose a challenge to any director, as one cannot utilize the traditional convention of individual character motivation. The director therefore will be responsible for helping the seven players find internal motivation for every sung phrase, rather than helping them uncover a specific end-goal.

The most exciting prospect of staging *Review* is the setting – Hell. Although we do have access to various cultural concepts of Hell that are generally accepted, we cannot truly know what Hell looks like. Is it stereotypically red with flames? Is it perhaps void of color and light? Is it an office building lined with barren cubicles? Is it isolation? When staging *Review*, the director has the opportunity to explore his or her imagination and creativity. This may be the most rewarding aspect of directing Jeremy Beck’s *Review*.

⁷³ Jeremy Beck, Interview with Jourdan Laine Howell, May 23, 2014. Bartlesville, Oklahoma, phone interview.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

As demonstrated in this dissertation, the practice and performance of mini-opera at the university level is a beneficial tool for several reasons. First, the performance duration dictates a limited scope with respect towards production. In other words, multiple scene and costume changes would be unnecessary. Additionally, accompanying forces would not be utilized to the same extent as they would when rehearsing and performing a two-hour opera, the result of which is a lower cost of production. Lower production costs make mini-opera repertoire ideal for colleges and/or universities. The minimal production demands make mini-operas easily transportable further bolstering the argument that the repertoire is ideal for colleges and universities as they engage in outreach and recruitment.

Second, the shorter duration affords student singers and stage directors the opportunity to hone skills necessary to a successful performance or direction career without the imposition of conceptualizing a character or stage concept for a full-scale production. As discussed in Jeremy Beck's *Review*, the student stage director is charged with navigating seven players on the stage at any point. He or she must learn to focus

the attention of audience members through successful directorial choices. He or she will utilize this skill continuously throughout his or her directing career.

Likewise, mini-opera builds upon the groundwork of scene study, challenging student singers to further develop their communicative abilities. Singers may be expected to develop a character more fully, addressing the character's intent and reactions through a complete plot. In other words, performing mini-opera requires that the student discover their goal and see it through to a resolution; this is not always the case with scene study. When singers and stage directors have gained insight from scene study and are prepared to take on a work that is more substantial, mini-opera performance will bridge the gap between scenes and full-scale productions from the standard repertoire.

Finally, the performance of mini-opera repertoire is important to the development of opera as a genre. Composers are actively engaged in writing new works that fit in the category of mini-opera. As contributors of to the art form, recognition and performance of their works is both admirable and necessary, particularly if the genre is to continue morphing through the ages. We cannot know who the next musical giant will be if we are not willing to explore works beyond the standard repertoire. Student singers and stage directors should be provided with the opportunity to be a part of the ever-changing framework of operatic history through the study and performance of mini-opera.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF SELECTED WORKS
FROM THE MINI-OPERA REPERTORY

DATE	OPERA	COMPOSER	VOICES	TIME
1909	Il segreto di Susanna	Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari	s, b	9:20
1927	Hin und Zurück	Paul Hindemith	s, 2t, b, bs	12:00
1928	L'Enlèvement d'Europe	Darius Milhaud	m, t, b, ens	9:23
1928	L'abandon d'Ariane	Darius Milhaud	2s, t, b, ens	8:58
1928	La Déliverance de Thésée	Darius Milhaud	s, m, t	7:34
1928	Egon und Emilie	Ernst Toch	s, narr	13:57
1930	Harpies	Marc Blitzstein	2s, m, cont, 2t, b, bs	16:00
1933	Catherine Parr	Anthony Collins	m, b, bs	20:00
1946	The Wind Remains	Paul Bowles	2m, 2t	20:00
1949	The Emporer's New Clothes	Douglas Moore	3t, b, 4 spk, ens	14:00
1950	Puss in Boots	Douglas Moore	m, 3b, 3bs, 2 spk, ens	15:00
1952	Boston Baked Beans	Gail Kubik	s, bs	20:00
1952	The Reluctant Hero	Eusebia Hunkins	2t, 2bs, ens	16:00
1952	The Princess	Arnold Franchetti	2s, a, b	15:00
1953	A Hand of Bridge	Samuel Barber	s, cont, t, b	15:00
1953	The Voice	Leslie Kondorossy	s,t, ens	20:00
1956	Ladies Voices	Vernon Martin	2s, 2a	8:00
1958	The Proposal	Gerald Humel	s, a, t, b	17:00
1961	The Great Boffo and his Talking Dog	Louis Gesensway	s, t, b, bs	20:00
1965	The Women	Thomas Pasatieri	s, m, b	14:00

1966	Notre Dame des Fleurs	Peter Maxwell	s, m, ct	6:00
1969	The Eve of St. Agnes	William mayer	2s, t, b, ens	14:00
1969	Frustration	Sheldon Harnick	s, a	5:00
1969	The Two Suitors	Colin Brumby	2s, 2t, b, narr	20:00
1971	Perpetual	Ernest Kanitz	s, t, bs-b	17:00
1972	Domestic Relations	Arthur Frackenpohl	s, m, 2b	20:00
1973	Scene: Domestic	Paul Turok	s, m, t	15:00
1973	The Facemen	Elaine Dobson	2s, a, t	20:00
1974	Image of Man	Michael Colgrass	2s, 5 a, 2t, 2b, 3bs, ens	20:00
1975	La Pizza del Destino	Steve Cohen	s, ct, b	10:24
1975	Bad Times	Stephen Oliver	b	8:00
1976	The Bremontown Musicians	Paul Earls	s, a, t, b	18:00
1977	The Garden	Stephen Oliver	s, t	20:00
1977	Cleopatra	Iain Hamilton	s	20:00
1977	Happ, or Orpheus in Clover	Erik Stokes	s, b, ens	11:00
1978	Magic Water	Leo Smit	s, cont, t, b, bs-b, 2bs	15:00
1979	The Dodo	Robert Lombardo	t, b, bs, 2 spk	20:00
1979	Mr. Pegotty's Dream Comes True	Lionel Lackey	3s, t, b	14:00
1980	A Man of Feeling	Stephen Oliver	s, b	20:00
1981	The Frog Who Become a Prince	Edward Barnes	s, b	20:00
1982	The Italian Lesson	Lee Hoiby	s or m, ens	19:00
1983	The Night Harry Stopped Smoking	Ross Dabrussin	3s, 3t, 3b	15:00
1983	A Little Nightmare Music	P.D.Q. Bach	t, b, 2 spk	20:00
1983	Anne Boleyn	Jeremy Beck	m, b	13:07

1986	Commuting	Stephen Oliver	ct, 2t, b, spk	18:00
1986	Everything Must Be Perfect	Seymour Barab	m	20:00
1987	Passion in the Principal's Office	Seymour Barab	s, t	20:00
1989	Bon Appétit!	Lee Hoiby	m	18:00
1996	may i feel, said he	Bright Cheng	s, t	7:00
1999	Avow	Mark Adamo	s, m, t, b, bs-b	12:00
2007	The Daughter of Capulet	Thomas Pasatieri	s	15:00
2007	Lady Macbeth	Thomas Pasatieri	s	18:00
2007	Gesualdo	Craig Armstrong	s, ct, 3t, b	20:00
2008	Remembrance Day	Stuart MacRae	s, cont, b	16:00
2009	Introduction and Good-Byes	Lukas Foss	b, ens	9:00
2009	Review	Jeremy Beck	3s, m, 2t, b, ens	15:00
2010	The Worst One Ever	Gary Bachlund	s, m, alto	10:00
2011	Deep Blue	Jason Charney	s, bs	10:58

Key: soprano (s), mezzo soprano (m), contralto (cont), countertenor (ct), tenor (t), baritone (b), bass-baritone (bs-b), bass (bs).

APPENDIX B

JUILLIARD DEGREE PLAN, JACOBS SCHOOL COURSES

JUILLIARD DEGREE PLAN, MUSIC DIVISION: BACHELOR OF MUSIC, VOICE

FIRST YEAR – DRAMATIC STUDIES FOR SINGERS

OPMUS 101-2 – Acting I for Singers

Full Year; Short units will focus on fundamental principles of acting and study of definitive texts. Throughout the year, students will have reading assignments and graded essays that supplement active class work.

VAMUS 101-2 – Movement I

OPMUS 500 – Opera Chorus

SECOND YEAR – DRAMATIC STUDIES FOR SINGERS

OPMUS 201-2 – Acting II for Singers

Full Year; Students will focus on the concepts of character, context, and imagination, working through a variety of exercises and assignments based on the techniques of Jacques Lecoq, among others. Classes will include frequent discussion of acting principles, presentation of monologues, and group work.

OPMUS 211-2 – Opera Studies

VAMUS 103-4 – Movement II

OPMUS 500 – Opera Chorus

THIRD YEAR – DRAMATIC STUDIES FOR SINGERS

OPMUS 301-2 – Acting III for Singers

Full Year; Students will study monologues and spoken scenes, and apply acting techniques directly to aria, song, or opera scene work. Study will focus on a variation of the Viewpoints technique specially adapted for singers.

OPMUS 311-2 – Opera Studies

OPMUS 500 – Opera Chorus

FOURTH YEAR – DRAMATIC STUDIES FOR SINGERS

OPMUS 401-2 – Acting IV for Singers

In this culminating year of the undergraduate acting curriculum, singers will focus on integrating and applying their acting technique to the performance of vocal repertoire.

OPMUS 411-2 – Opera Studies

OPMUS 500 – Opera Chorus

JACOBS SCHOOL COURSES FOR VOCAL MAJORS

MUS R391 – Principles of Acting in Opera

Consent of instructor. Basic techniques for the singing actor. Movement, use of body language, use of props, techniques of interpretation, and analysis of text and music.

MUS R471 – Vocal Performance Workshop I

MUS R472 – Vocal Performance Workshop II

Successful completion of Upper-Division Examination. Open to Undergraduate voice majors in the Jacobs School of Music; other students by permission of the instructor. Opera arias and ensembles, musical theater repertoire and spoken texts from theatrical works. Audition techniques, stage movement, and a staged “scenes” production performance.

MUS R502 – Stage Management

Survey of the duties and responsibilities of the stage manager in opera. The student is expected to serve as stage manager for at least one of the productions of the IU Opera Theater. Preparation of the production book is emphasized.

MUSR505 – Opera Stage Direction Technique 1

Consent of the instructor. Basic language and analytical technique for interpreting operatic scores. Techniques for organization and producing works of music theater. Written analysis of scenes, practice in staging scenes projects.

MUS R571 – Opera Workshop

Consent of instructor. Staging and interpretive exploration of operatic arias and ensembles. Class work culminates in staged public performance.

MUS R572 – Opera Workshop

Consent of instructor. Advanced work in movement and role characterization for the opera stage. Class work culminates in a public performance of staged arias and scenes.

APPENDIX C

VOCAL PASSAGGI AND REGISTERS

SOPRANO AND MEZZO SOPRANO VOICE⁷⁴

SOPRANO	REGISTER	REGISTER RANGE	PASSAGGIO
	Flageolet/Whistle	D6 to A6	
	Upper	G5 to C6/C#6	
	Upper Middle	C#5 to F#5	Upper/Secondo
	Lower Middle	Bb3 to C5	
	Chest	G3 to Eb4	Lower/Primo
MEZZO SOPRANO	REGISTER	REGISTER RANGE	PASSAGGIO
	Flageolet/Whistle	C6 to E6	
	Upper	F5/F#5 to Bb5/B5	
	Upper Middle	Bb4/B4 to E5/F5	Upper/Secondo
	Lower Middle	C4 to Bb4/B4	
	Chest	E3/F3 to E4/F4	Lower/Primo

⁷⁴ Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.