Barber, Rorem, and Foss
3 approaches to music and libretto

an essay by Elizabeth Smith

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I was pleasantly surprised when Paul Oomens emailed me and showed interest in my dissertation. Paul invited me to summarize the main parts of my dissertation in such a way that the average theatre lover could understand the interactions between the musical score and the drama of the libretto. Indeed, creating a stronger attraction to the works. He also asked me to add a chapter on Rorem's *Four Dialogues*, which was my first encounter with this strong piece. I was quite excited by this project as I think the Dutch public will love these operas as much as I do. The frequent email-traffic across the ocean lead to the following interpretation of three masterpieces, all worthy to be enjoyed by the Dutch theatre lover.

Looking behind the faces in Samuel Barber's A Hand of Bridge

The characters of *A Hand of Bridge* are two couples. They are presented as separate individuals with unique desires. The only interaction between the characters is the actual playing of the card game. The "card music", which accompanies this action, introduces, intertwines, and even interrupts the brief arias with its jazz-influenced swung rhythms and a quasi-walking bass line. While the music communicates a relaxed atmosphere, it is more appropriately interpreted as a "poker face" for each character is fronting their happiness. Barber uses a melodic link, which through careful construction, allows the passage to blend with a variety of music—essential as the card music occurs at various points throughout the opera. The repetitions within the music suggest not only that the game is a common, everyday occurrence, but also reflect the cyclical nature of the actual card game.
With meticulously planned text expressed over the card music, Menotti foreshadows the underlying themes of the opera, suggesting conflicts within the characters' lives that have occurred outside the timeframe of the opera. These ideas are cloaked within the coded communicative properties of the bidding process in the game of bridge. For Sally and Bill, their bids of hearts represent their desires to be loved. Sally's bid, raising to two in the same suit, could indicate that she is only somewhat satisfied with her partner's suit—her husband's

love. Sally's exclamation "The Queen, You have trumped the Queen," suggests her awareness of Bill's actions. Her scrutiny of his misplay of trump, which is hearts, signifies her observations of Bill's misuse of his desires for love. Therefore, the game itself suggests that Sally consciously allows Bill to indulge his mistress without confrontation as she continues to "bid" for her husband's love.

In a striking contrast, neither Geraldine nor David speaks of hearts. As Geraldine's aria will reveal, her life is as loveless as her bridge hand is heartless. Traditionally in bridge, passing to your partner's initial bid, as David has done, communicates a lack of support for the bid. Here it can be interpreted quite literally as representing David's lack of support (no love) for his wife. With the cards stacked against her, bidding from the bottom of the barrel with clubs, the lowest ranking suit in this game, Geraldine continues to make the best out of the cards she has been dealt, the life that she has been given. Nonetheless her bid is an un-winnable contract; her marriage is without love. Finally, when offered a perfect opportunity to speak of love following Sally and Bill's statements of "Hearts," David says "Trump!" As hearts have been declared trump for this game, David has chosen a term expressing *his desires* for authority and power over one of love.

The opening bids of this game of bridge show the four characters intensely long for unattainable desires. However, only three distinct passions are communicated: Sally and Bill exude a desire to be intensely and intimately loved, Geraldine longs for a loving platonic relationship, and David dreams of a life in which he is a ruler with power and authority over the masses who are to serve and respect him, both socially and sexually. Barber's structural division of the opera supports the interpretation of this three-part thematic schema. The first section contains both Sally's and Bill's aria, the second Geraldine's aria, and the third David's aria. The sections are separated by card music interludes and each section lasts approximately three minutes. While Menotti has saturated the opening text of the opera with the fundamental themes via the bidding process, the text and music of the arias illustrate explicitly the characters' unfulfilled desires.

Sally

Sally's aria features two markedly different sections. The first has an almost obsessive, driving, repetitive eighth-note melody, which sets the words "I want to buy that hat of peacock feathers." The dramatic narrative of the first section has a tri-fold construction. On the surface, Sally is desperate to buy a hat of peacock feathers. Sally's obsession with materialistic pleasures is, on the middleground, a substitution for the intimacy of her marriage. Sally's underlying background-level longing is to be the object of her husband's desire. Sally seems to have lost her identity in the real world and escapes to a fantastical world centering her attentions on buying a hat of peacock feathers. Sally's observation of her husband's affair seems to have sparked a narcissistic response. In her self-admiration, Sally obsessively and fantastically takes to the task of adorning herself with a hat of peacock feathers, a symbol of vanity. It seems unlikely that Sally would confront Bill about the affair for the confrontation would require admittance that Sally was, for some reason, physically undesirable.

Barber sets Sally's melodic line with an accompaniment in a distinctly different key. This bifurcated tonality expresses Sally's internal conflict. The resulting dissonances are accented by leaps in the melodic line that coincide with the word "peacock." The music mimics Sally's dramatic narrative of aggravation and frustration with a gradual increase and subsequent explosion of dissonance in the musical narrative.

The second section is more melodic than the first rhythmic and percussive section. This second section functions to connect Sally's projection of desire toward a material object as an intoxicatingly euphoric escape from the brutal reality of her husband's affair. Sally's melody represents her psychosis as her melody dances blissfully in C-flat major despite the accompaniment and key signature that suggest A-flat major. The contrasting section supports that Sally is aware of her husband's affair. Its pleasurable world of fantasy suggests a reality worthy of escape. Sally's desires have three levels. The text focuses on Sally's obsession with hats. The music creates a feeling of fantasy that can be interpreted as Sally's substitution of materialist goods for her emotional desires. Finally, the combination of card play, text, and music suggests that Sally is in search of her husband's love.

Bill

Bill's monologue describes his longing for the intimate company of his mistress Cymbaline. Like Sally's music, Bill's also exemplifies characteristics of an obsessive fantasy. While Sally's aria exhibits tonal conflict through its dissonance and percussive rhythmic scheme, Bill's music is a danceable, flowing melody. The fanatical temperament of the fantasy is written out in the repetition of the three-note scalar passages while the libretto further expresses his fixation via the string of six questions that Bill states during the aria as well as the list of names of other possible suitors for his mistress. Although he states that he would like for Cymbaline to be his wife, the continuation of the fantasy music in both the melody and the accompaniment suggests that this statement is spurious. The physical nature of Bill's desire is supported by the change in the accompaniment from the consonant, tonal harmonic structure of the fantasy music to one that features oscillation of dissonant intervals as he expresses his physical desires to take Cymbaline home and quote "strangle in the dark!"

As Bill and Sally seem to have similar desires the question still remains: why are Bill's desires not directed at his wife? Both characters have been given music that suggests notions of obsession and fantasy. The crucial factor, however, is the direction of these obsessions and fantasies. Sally's monologue is a product of the reality with which she is faced. It is not her actual desire, but rather a temporary escape from her unfulfilled desire. Bill, on the other hand, wants his imaginary world to be the reality. He longs for an imaginary scenario, and therefore, it can never become reality.

Geraldine

Geraldine's monologue expresses her desire to love her mother who is deathly ill. In her aria she sings of her desire for not only someone to love her, but also for someone to love. Geraldine cannot relate to the people in her life on a personal level. She remembers her father not as a person, but as a faded photograph, and associates her husband and son with the stock market and football, respectively. Her psychological conflicts are played out in the tonal conflict between her G major melody (Geraldine's emotional state) and the B-flat major accompaniment (her unfulfilling life). The half-step motion in the melody reflects Geraldine's emotional struggle—never quite stable.

As Geraldine's aria turns to the subject of her gravely ill mother, she achieves a moment of stability as the melody stays in B-flat major for six measures. In the absence of a bifurcated tonality, we can suspect Geraldine has found someone to love her. Unfortunately, Geraldine's wish to experience her mother's love is doomed. As she sings, "hatching for

herself the black wings of death," the B-flat major tonality is abandoned, returning to her earlier G major. The accompaniment also returns to its earlier pattern. Thus, neither Geraldine nor her unfulfilling life has changed. Geraldine's aria concludes with the words, "I am learning to love you." Her end is not without struggle, as Barber musically depicts requiring both a *poco allargando* and *diminuendo* with the approach to the highest pitch of the aria. Unfortunately, Geraldine falls short of attaining love as her climatic pitch descends to conclude her aria.

David

David, too, is without love; however, love is not the object of his desires. David's aria expresses his desires to be rich and powerful: "a Rockefeller, the King of Diamonds, a Sultan of America." These desires suggest that his current social status prevents him from achieving happiness. As David has virtually no relationship with his wife, his desires for power suggest the need for a relationship with someone else.

The musical setting of these desires is not forceful or empowering, but rather a lamenting fixation on the drudgery of his life. David's melody is built on the pentatonic scale G-A-B-D-E (sol-la-ti-re-mi) while the accompaniment drones the pedal tones E and B (mi and ti). Adding to the ethnic sounds of the pentatonic melody and drone bass, the notion of exoticism is expressed in the libretto with reference to a Nubian slave. It is more prominently played out stylistically in the instrumentation of the winding "snake charming" countermelody scored in the oboe and clarinet parts as well as the delicately added percussion featuring castanets and triangle.

Singing of twenty naked boys and twenty naked girls, it seems evident that David's sexual fantasies are purely physical—and perhaps deviant—with no intimate love. Barber's use of exoticism in this aria is an exploitation of David's cross-over gender characteristics, which could also suggest that his marriage is not "traditionally" functional. Just as David's fantasy has no outlet for personal intimacy, his marriage has no outlet for him either. Menotti's libretto tells us that David hides his own book by Havelock Ellis, which in the mid-twentieth century, was popular for its discussions of the psychology of sex in society and marriage. This hidden book could be a symbol for David's suppressed deviant sexual desires. Barber supports this notion in the musical narrative as the rhythmic setting of this text appears to resemble an anxiety-ridden secret through the rhythmic dissonances played out with triplets and syncopated sixteenth dotted-eighth rhythms.

Barber's setting of the second portion of David's aria further depicts David's social displacement. Here his music moves bombastically from chord to chord without functioning in a key. Metrically, David's melody shifts from groupings of threes to twos, rarely supporting the notated bar line. These musical features reflect David's interaction with his wife Geraldine. David executes his daily activities with no consideration to his wife or her desires. David and Geraldine do not relate to each other as a couple and have completely different desires. Consequently, their arias have contrasting musical styles and they bid opposing suits in their card game.

Conclusion

Looking at just the surface of Menotti's libretto, Sally would simply want to buy a hat; Bill would be just another adulterous husband; Geraldine a depressed housewife; and David your average worker dreaming of riches. Instead, the text and the music, the librettist and the composer, all coalesce to create a rich and multi-layered narrative of *A Hand of Bridge*. The opera becomes an exciting tale of thwarted desires expressed through the communicative properties of bridge as the characters mask their internal conflicts with their best poker-face.

Four Dialogues: I'm very lonely in Rorem's way

The Subway

With virtually no scenery to support the drama, Rorem creates an image of the subway through the mechanical sounds of the piano accompaniment. Dissonantly-clustered chords, *sforzando* accents, and a steady, driving tempo, quickly paint the stage with the ambiance of a clattering train car. It is without warning that the male character of the opera begins his fanfare-like announcement of the newspaper headlines. The piano accompaniment remains unchanged, continuing to "chug" along during the man's proclamation. However, two significant musical events occur as he wonders "why wasn't the late edition ready tonight?" The accompaniment is suddenly silent, and the meter shifts from 8/8 to 3/2. As the accompaniment and meter return to the original train music in the very next bar, this minute moment is distinctly marked. It may suggest that the man's obsession with the newspaper transcends the confines of the subway car. The newspaper has enough importance to demand the man's full attention—communicated with the change of meter and absence of accompaniment. Rorem's musical setting foreshadows the drama later in the Apartment. As the train ride continues, the accompaniment functions either as a continuation of the subway sounds, or as support for the characters' thoughts about each other and their greater life desires. Such is the case as the man steps on the woman's foot and suddenly expresses his desire to have her. While the woman's response is a reiterated "No," her melodic line moves through a variety of pitches, almost suggesting insecurity in her repeated response. Here, the accompaniment returns to it's train-like sounds, and not only is the audience reminded of the characters' location, but also the man remembers that he must depart the train. He engages the woman—who had just repeatedly told him "no"—in a casual, yet urgent, conversation about which stop is next. He quite craftily maintains the woman's attention, sparks her curiosity as to "where" exactly "there" is, and begins to woo her with a calm, lyrical melody. Again, they are both momentarily transported away from the clanging train as the accompaniment supports the man's song. The woman protests to joining the man, listing a variety of previous engagements—including a marital one. Still, the accompaniment maintains the characteristics of the man's ballad. This signifies that the woman, too, is caught up in the fantastical emotional display. Her underlying desires to be with the man are symbolized by her melody that mimics the song the man sang. He leads her with a suggestive "and" at the end of each excuse she gives. The urgency of her decision is communicated as the accompaniment returns to the train music, reminding everyone that either the love affair will end as the man exits the train at his stop or the woman will agree to leave with the man. It is only in the final four bars of the movement that

the two characters sing in a rhythmic unison as their melodies mirror each other with an inverted counterpoint. Their fates are now bound together.

The Airport

After a seemingly confident end to the first movement, the woman agrees to go stargazing at the airport with the man. The second movement begins with an almost haunting minor-mode melody. The woman's recitative awkwardly describes the car and the parking lot as lovely. Her trepidation over her decision to pursue this stranger—while engaged to another man—consumes the mood of the movement. The opening melody is transposed to various keys before returning to G-sharp minor as the two characters sing of their fears and desires. These transpositions suggest that the woman is attempting to justify her actions, approaching the situation from various viewpoints. Moving in a "stream of consciousness," she eventually expresses each of her fears then ultimately admitting that she does desire the man. Indeed, Rorem supports her acceptance of the ensuing relationship with a shift to A-flat major. This joyous moment is quickly thwarted by the woman's continuing fears. The harmony pivots on a G-diminished chord, which is expected to resolve to an A-flat major tonic, but instead shifts downward to F minor, as both characters sing, "fear the fire." In layman's terms, Rorem creates the expectation of happiness, but seamlessly returns to the anxiety of their fears. Although the third movement begins without pause, the second movement cadences with a harmony that leaves the listener salivating for the relationship to unfold.

The Apartment

A return to the lively accompaniment style from the first movement serves to establish precedence for daily activity within the new scene set in the apartment. The woman's song expresses her happiness with their relationship. Despite her sincerity, the accompaniment at the end of her song hints at conflict through the dissonant cluster-chords which sound in various octaves. Curiously, this textural change accompanies the line "I am not your bawd," which begs the question, why would the woman need to qualify herself as *not* a prostitute? Remembering back to the opening scene on the subway, the woman refers to the bluegrass of her ancestors. This may suggest a rural, country life upbringing that would be considerably below that of the man who will soon sing of his history of pampering, being born off Cape Horn, and his insurance investments. Thus, the woman may be expressing that her motivations are love and not money, however, on a grander scale, it shows a significant difference between the characters.

The movement takes a quick turn when the man accusatively barks questions at the woman who sweetly denies the mishandling of his newspaper. Remember from the subway his obsessive predilection for newspapers! The cluster chords heard at the end of the woman's song take over as a dominant motive for the accompaniment to the argument. Layered with this motive are fragments of the movements opening material. If the opening material represents the daily activities in the apartment, pairing it with the argumentative cluster chords suggests that the couple has engaged in various squabbles. Indeed, the man's annoyance with the woman's threat of screaming can only indicate that this is yet another repetition of a familiar pattern in the couple's relationship.

One of the most crucial and exciting moments of this movement is in fact a bar of silence. As the couple's argument climaxes with the man declaring that he is going to Spain and the

woman expressing “you hateful man, leave while you can,” both voices become silent as the accompaniment texture thins out. All activity stops, musically portrayed by the bar of rest. Perhaps in previous arguments, at the end of this silence, the couple reconciles. The short silence shows the enormous importance of the moment: the sublime void in which peace and war are decided upon. Then, abruptly, the couple aggressively continues their climatic declamations—in rhythmic and melodic unison—both agreeing that the end has come.

In Spain and In New York

As the title of the movement clearly indicates, the two characters are no longer together. Rorem creates a sense of the dynamic emotional process that followed the abrupt resolution of their relationship by opening the movement with a stoic impressionistic drudgery of chords. This section gives way to a penitent, lyrical, and somewhat familiar melody. Each of the two pianos presents the melody individually before the vocalists enter. Here, the pianos may represent each of the characters realizing their longing *internally* before they outwardly express their emotions in the song. As the woman and the man—oceans apart—wonder of each other, their melody is based on a theme from the Apartment. They long to be together again. It is only in their separation that their desires become one, their melodies now the same.

Each continuing with thoughts of each other, their words are similar, but not exactly alike. After expressing their loneliness, the couple’s final cadence concludes on an A major sonority. The strength of this cadence creates a sense of irrevocability. Steadfast to their argument in the Apartment, they each refuse to begrudge each other’s loneliness. In the final silence, the two will remain apart.

Conclusion

Rorem’s musical setting of Frank O’Hara’s text expands the drama into the multifaceted operatic genre. With the intention of a sparse staging, the accompaniment provides the backdrop for each location, painting the stage with sound. While in the first movement the accompaniment creates the literal soundscape of the subway train, in the remaining movements the accompaniment paints the emotional background for the scenes. Anger and frustration are communicated with careful articulations and pronounced dissonances while Rorem’s artful melodies express the characters love, anxiety, and longing.

Crescendo and decrescendo in Lukas Foss' Introductions and Goodbyes

"A cocktail party has become the most popular way for the modern hostess to entertain more guests than she can possibly have to dinner in the limited space of her house or apartment. [..] Let me here make a plea for two or more small parties, rather than trying to invite to a single one all to whom an invitation is due. [..] The guests at the small party will all be comfortable and able to enjoy conversation with each other, which is certainly not the case when they are standing pressed together and where there is no place to put down a glass, or even a burning cigarette for that matter."[1]

Lukas Foss described the libretto for *Introductions and Good-Byes* as "musical, with a natural built-in *crescendo* and *diminuendo* (From one person on stage, there is a gradual increase to 10 persons, then a gradual decrease back to one)." The structure of the opera mimics the unfolding of a cocktail party—arrival, conversation, and departure. A greater sense of the opera's underlying social commentary can be seen through the lens of Scott Lash's *critical* approach to reflexivity. The opera exhibits characteristics of "agency, [that] set free from the constraints of social structure, then reflects on the 'rules' and 'resources' of such structure reflects on agency's social conditions of existence."[2] Indeed, the opera is not really about a specific cocktail party, but rather it examines the general rules of formal etiquette within the elite social setting. Mr. McC's formal introduction of each character can be perceived as a nod to the "social structure" in which names and titles carry more weight than what the opera projects as empty conversation. In Lash's terms, these "rituals" are symbolic of the formation of a subculture—here an elitist group, which includes a doctor, a general, a count and ladies of seemingly high-society.[3]

Prelude

The opera's prelude begins with a disjunct and pointillistic melody that spans a range of six octaves. Within the almost aleatoric passage, Foss creates unity as the first, last, and lowest pitches of the passage are all the pitch D. The expansive spacing within these opening measures musically describes the room in which the party will take place: a large, open space with a single servant moving about making final adjustments and preparations.
The prelude's next thirty-two bars feature a xylophone solo. Here, Foss conveys the sound of someone making martinis with the xylophone timbre. The repetitive pitches, rhythmically irregular *glissandos*, and frequent octave displacements within this solo all mimic the sounds of clanking bottles and clinking glasses.
The prelude concludes with a return to the opening material. Although not an actual repeat of the beginning measures, the length, set and interval content, and pitch centricity (on D) are all the same as the initial passage. This music once again focuses the audience on the party's setting as the servant leaves the room after completing the final preparations.

[1] Emily Post. *Etiquette, The Blue Book of Social Usage* (New York, Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1959),135-136.
[2] Scott Lash, "Reflexivity and its Doubles: Structure, Aesthetics, Community" in *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 115.
[3] Ibid, 147.

Introductions

Foss divides the first section of introductions into three parts: first Miss Addington-Stitch and her friend Le comte de la Tour-Tournée arrive; Mr. and Mrs. Cotlensky arrive second; and finally Miss Panchanera and Dr. Lavender-Gas. Foss' compositional approach to this section—the music repeats with slight but significant alterations to the harmony, pitch-level, or texture—reflects the repetitions within casual conversation and small talk, socially appropriate for a cocktail party. Each of the first four guests is represented by one of the four chorus voices. Their responses of "How do you do" are chant-like drones that occur in individual, elided, and simultaneous iterations. The style of text setting suggests a formal and expected social etiquette for the party, an etiquette with which all the guests are familiar. Mr. McC, the initiator of these introductions, is the only singing character in the opera. His musical lines are both rhythmically and melodically independent from the accompaniment. However, the specific pitches of Mr. McC's melody frequently outline the same harmonies as accompaniment. These compositional elements support interpreting the host as one who is aware of everyone around him (fitting in harmonically), not actually involved in any conversation (independent rhythm and melody), and dedicated to assuring that all his guests meet each other (clear syllabic text).

Foss builds a climax at the end of this section, repeating fragments of the previous accompaniment pattern over a dominant pedal. A rising scalar line embedded within this extended dominant harmony contributes to the mounting tension. Following the climax at the end of the first section of introductions, the party becomes less formal (as indicated in the stage directions). While Mr. McC continues to introduce the guests with the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Wilderkunstein, the chorus is tacet for this section. The lack of response to the introductions of this section further communicates to the audience that the guests are beginning to interact with each other and have moved past the general introductory conversations.

Although the accompaniment to General Ortega y Guadalupe's arrival is composed of a previously established pattern, his arrival is marked by a number of significant differences. The General is the only guest to arrive alone. When Mr. McC first speaks the General's name, all other musical activity ceases. The chorus reenters with a more rhythmic response repeating the name rather than a simple "how do you do." Also, the lower-voice of the accompaniment pattern adds to the unique and stylistic sound of the music during General Ortega y Guadalupe's arrival. All these differences suggest that the General may be the guest of honor at this party.

Conversations

Regarding the material between the final introduction and the first good-bye, Foss writes: "…I composed a texture made up of name-composites. My intention here was to create an effect of simultaneous conversations, a jumble, for which I used, true to style and project, only titles and names (example: general or-de-la-tour-y-guadding-ton-stein)." In addition to the fragmented names that Foss described, the soprano text provides multiple iterations of a melismatic "ha." Each occurrence is set to the same two bars of music. It seems unlikely that a person would sustain laughter throughout a single conversation, thus the soprano line suggests that multiple conversations are taking place over a considerable span of time.

Further, this passage is the first since the prelude to incorporate a meter other than 3/4. The alternation between 3/4 and 5/8 time offers a parallel to the "skewed" time represented dramatically in this passage.
This passage's texture is the densest of all the opera. Each of the four chorus voices has a rhythmically and melodically distinct part with only the soprano voice being doubled in the upper-voice of the accompaniment. Despite its complexity, the music in this section does not develop, rather, Foss repeats each two-bar segment. Together, the music and text create an operatic moment in which the sounds mimic party conversations without suggesting any specific storylines.

Good-Byes

Mr. McC begins to bid his guests farewell with the same pitches with which he welcomed them. Foss maintains a fuller texture following the section of conversation giving the chorus lines of "goodbye," "I had a most enjoyable time," various titles, and eventually names. The chorus parts become less distinct from one another, finally coming to rhythmic homophony. As Mr. and Mrs. Wilderkunstein depart, once again it is suggested that General Ortega y Guadalupe is the guest of honor. Here, Mr. McC asks if the Wilderkunsteins have met the General and begins again to introduce them, making it seem specifically important for them to have met the General.
The guests leave in three different groups. The first departure occurs without tonal closure as the accompaniment does not complete the cadence. Traditional tonal cadential patterns sound the second two groups' departures as well as Mr. McC's final good-bye. Following the last cadence no guests remain; however, the accompaniment still does not provide the tonic. This allows for the host (and soloist) Mr. McC to give a final good-bye leading not only to tonic, but also to the beginning of the epilogue. It is as if the host can breathe finally, after the burden of all etiquette has been put aside. No obligations, just empty glasses.

Epilogue

The epilogue begins with a return of the music from the middle section of the prelude. This reflects the similarities in the activities of setting up for the party and cleaning up afterwards. The music is transposed, however, reflecting the actual change of pitch in the sounds of the clinking of glass. The bottles of liquor are now less full (transposition down in the accompaniment). The glasses may contain the remains of the final cocktails (transposition up in the xylophone). The quotation from the prelude concludes with the written out trill previously associated with the stirring of the martinis. Maintaining this association, Mr. McC has another martini (indicated in the stage directions), perhaps in celebration of a successful social event.
The final bars of the epilogue return to the prelude's opening pointillistic texture. The ultimate four bars of music correspond with bars 9-12 of the prelude. Pitches are mirrored as to inform the listener that the servant's party preparations are now mirrored by the servant completing the cleaning and departing. Then, just as the commotion of the party has faded away, the music mimics and fades away, leaving Mr. McC, martini in hand, alone on stage as he was first seen at the opera's beginning.

Conclusion

The overall form of the opera with its palindromic design can be described in terms of the chiasmus (essentially an ABB'A format). The musical and dramatic similarities of the prelude and epilogue, introductions and good-byes, and perhaps the conversations and brief silence (prior to the first good-bye) dissolve the oppositional nature of these sections, rendering them mirrored images (sonorities) of each other. The effect is to place focus on the ritualistic preparations for social interaction rather than on any actual social content. Indeed, in an ironic twist, the very nature of the center part of the opera as an "event" is called into question. When the host pours himself a martini in the final moments of the opera, the audience sympathizes with his relief at successfully orchestrating the formalized societal discourse—he is now (at least until the next social occasion) free of the restraints of high-society etiquette. Menotti's and Foss' textual and musical craftsmanship come together in a formal plan that creates a cohesive and dynamic operatic performance, with critical commentary on the underlying themes of social etiquette and elitism. The basis, of which, is little more than a list of names.

A final comparison between the three chamber operas

Rorem's use of music enhances the drama of the libretto by articulating the emotional context of the characters' relationship. Throughout the opera, they outwardly react to each other. Their accompaniment expresses their literal and emotional surroundings, but it is the characters' words, the libretto, that dictates the music.

This can be seen as a contrast to Barber's use of music in *A Hand of Bridge*. Barber's melodic lines and accompaniment serve to develop the characters introspectively. The music supplements the libretto rather than paralleling or paraphrasing it. The accompaniment may represent a deeper psychological level of the character or the interaction of the character with the outside world. In both cases, the accompaniment seems to affect the emotional state of the character.

Foss registers in the middle of the Rorem/Barber spectrum in terms of the relationship between music and drama. Like Rorem, Foss uses music to set the stage, to describe the party room, to amplify the sounds of the characters' actions. But Foss also uses music to build the relationships between the characters. In these cases, he supplements the libretto in a manner similar to Barber.

Every composer must work within the constraints of the libretto. The libretto may contribute greatly to the differences between operas. Both the Barber and Foss operas have libretti written by their colleague: composer Gian Carlo Menotti. The two libretti have a static quality: one room, a well-defined set of characters, and few movements. For dramatic strength both libretti almost require that music fill in parts of the story. This characteristic is not a fault in Menotti's writing, but rather an intentional product of his musical understanding.

As a striking contrast, Frank O'Hara's libretto for Rorem's *Four Dialogues*, though written with then intention of being set to music, maintains the characteristics of a fully structured

stage-drama. The explicit, Pop-Art-way of dealing with love, annoyance, and anger lends some distance (even alienation) and humor to the text, just as comical plays and Opera Buffa in the 18th century did. This aspect is absolutely absent in the two Menotti's libretti. Neither approach should be considered superior to the other. In fact, the contrast between the three operas may leave the listener content with a full understanding of the man and the woman in Rorem's *Four Dialogues*, uneasy with Mr. McC's cocktail party (was the event a success or a failure?) in Foss' *Introductions and Goodbyes*, and with a continuing sense of wonder toward the unfulfilled desires of the bridge players in Barber's elegant *A Hand of Bridge*.

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