2004

An original work: "Brothers and Sisters" and Songs from Letters by Libby Larsen: an analysis

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AN ORIGINAL WORK: “BROTHERS AND SISTERS”
AND SONGS FROM LETTERS
BY LIBBY LARSEN:
AN ANALYSIS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
in
The School of Music

by
Andrea J. Mitternight
B.M., Louisiana State University, 1995
M.M., University of South Carolina, 1997
May 2004
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Abstract

This dissertation consists of two parts. The first part is an original composition by the author entitled “Brothers and Sisters.” The orchestra piece is an expressive program symphony in three movements. The first movement features sections of driving rhythms and fluctuating meters. Two new sections, more reflective and stable in nature, offset the more volatile sections. Herein lie moments of steady and unchanging rhythms and a sense of constancy. The movement ends with a return of the furious instability heard in the previous sections.

Unlike the first movement, the second begins with a more somber mood. The introduction exposes the lower registers of the orchestra, providing more solo passages and instrumental pairings. Toward the end of the movement, a poignant quote of the first movement reminds the listener of the instability previously heard in the piece, and the final section exposes the upper registers in the orchestra.

The third movement contains a highly rhythmic introduction in the percussion. Pensive sections echo motives in the first and second movements. The finale alludes to the instability heard in the first movement. The driving rhythms finally give way to melancholy and apathy. Still, an echo of the second movement gives the listener a hopeful ending rather than a sorrowful one.

The second part of the dissertation explores Libby Larsen’s Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey, 1880-1902. Before discussing the original version of the piece, a brief history of Calamity Jane’s life and legend is described. Additionally, the text, which Larsen fashions from an edited compilation of Calamity’s letters, provides
much explanation about Calamity Jane as a person. The analysis portion describes how Larsen reuses motives. She combines portions of motives and transforms them to present new motives where she redefines their function.

In the orchestrated version of *Songs from Letters*, Larsen enhances the narrative further. She uses several orchestral techniques and colors to enhance the beauty and sadness of Calamity’s words. Through the use of characterization, the flute and clarinet provide a representation of Calamity and Bill, respectively. The characterization offers a subconscious view of Calamity’s nature.
Part I. An Original Work: “Brothers and Sisters”

Dedicated to and written for my brother-in-law Justin Brothen, my sister Pamela Mitternight Brothen, and her brother-in-law Kjel Brothen.

(Because of the dedications, I consider the title of this piece to be more appropriately named Brothens and Sisters.)

Brothers and Sisters is an expressive program symphony in three movements. While the title of each movement describes a particular character trait or mood, the listener can just as easily enjoy the piece without having any knowledge of its meaning or subjects. Much is left to the listener’s imagination.

The first movement, features sections of driving rhythms and fluctuating meters. The harmonic language employed further complements these more unbalanced subdivisions. While these sections cannot fully be considered dissonant, functional tonality is not employed. To offset these segments, this movement consists of two sections more reflective and stable in nature. Herein lie moments of functional tonality, steady and unchanging rhythms, and a sense of constancy. The movement ends with a return of the furious instability heard in the previous subsections. To further articulate the shifting nature within the movement, a rondo-like form is employed.

Unlike the first movement, the second begins with a more somber mood. The introduction exposes the lower registers of the orchestra, providing more solo passages and instrumental pairings. As in the three more unstable sections of the first movement, the harmonic language does not employ functional tonality. Rather, pitch sets are provided and constantly expanded throughout. Toward the end of the movement, a poignant quote of the first movement reminds the listener of the instability previously heard in the piece. Converse to the opening, the final section exposes the upper registers in the orchestra, which provides a balanced ternary form to the movement.

The third movement is the longest of the three. The highly rhythmic introduction in the percussion provides the listener with a feel reminiscent of a march. Pensive sections echo motives in the first and second movements. Seemingly through-composed, the movement uses enough motivic material to reveal a ternary form. The finale alludes to the instability heard in the first movement, although the harmonic language, tempo, and eventual mood are dissimilar. The driving rhythms, which once marked the determination and purpose of the first movement, finally give way to a much-desired quote from the first movement.

Duration – approximately 20 minutes
## Instrumentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Timpani</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piccolo</td>
<td>Percussion Battery:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Flutes</td>
<td>Crotali (with bow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Oboes</td>
<td>Snare Drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Horn</td>
<td>Tenor Drum (with Snares)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Clarinets in Bb</td>
<td>3 Tom-Toms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Clarinet in Bb</td>
<td>Tenor Drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bassoons</td>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrabassoon</td>
<td>Suspended Cymbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto Saxophone in Eb</td>
<td>High Hat</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Violins II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Trumpets in C</td>
<td>Violas</td>
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<td>Contrabasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The tenor with snares may be replaced by a tom-tom drum with snares.*
Brothers and Sisters
Movement 1. The Great Skate

Andrea J. Mitternight
Movement 2. Devilish Spright
Movement 3. Armoured
Part II. *Songs from Letters* by Libby Larsen: An Analysis

Chapter 1. Introduction: Libby Larsen and *Songs from Letters*

Composer Libby Larsen, winner of numerous awards including two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1982 and 1984)\(^1\) and a Grammy in 1994 for producing *The Art of Arleen Auger*, enjoys a renown that few contemporary composers achieve in their lifetime. Choosing a career as a composer outside of academia, she co-founded the Minnesota Composers Forum (now the American Composers Forum) with composer Stephen Paulus in 1973. Larsen served as composer-in-residence with the Minnesota Orchestra from 1983 to 1987. Additionally, Larsen served as resident composer for the Charlotte (North Carolina) Symphony Orchestra as well as the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra.\(^2\) Widely performed in all genres, she has amassed an extensive discography.

On demand as a visiting professor and guest lecturer at numerous institutions, Larsen secures exposure for her music and a stage for her musical causes. These endorsements include American music and women composers. In addition, Larsen advocates the promotion of music education for all age groups. Tireless in her efforts, she maintains accessibility by conducting interviews for children’s education as well as lending her voice to the research of scholars.

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In addition to the distinctions listed above, Larsen has also been awarded numerous commissions, many of which include works for stage. However, her vocal works surpass the number of commissions for stage. These vocal works often focus on the biographies of strong female characters and their ideals. Examples include *ME Brenda Ueland* (from the autobiography of Brenda Ueland) (1987), *Black Birds, Red Hills* (on the painter Georgia O’Keefe) (1989), and *Mary Cassatt* (the only American painter to exhibit with the impressionist artists) (1994).³ In the same vein, the chamber ensemble *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1989), written for Arleen Auger on Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poems, results from a close collaboration between the two women to create a uniquely melodic work. Her opera *Mrs. Dalloway* (1993), which incorporates electronic instruments with an acoustic ensemble, focuses on Virginia Woolf. The dramatic cantata *Eleanor Roosevelt* (1996), for singers and spoken voices, focuses on the life of the first lady.⁴ Additionally, women pioneers of the American West appear as topics of her dance-orchestral piece *Ghosts of an Old Ceremony* (1991).⁵ This monograph examines another important commission, *Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey, 1880-1902*, featuring one of the most infamous women of the American West.

**Genesis of Songs from Letters**

In an interview dated July 19, 2003 Larsen states that Benton Hess, a friend of hers and the accompanist to Mary Elizabeth Poore, contacted Larsen because Poore was

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scheduled to perform her debut concert on April 8, 1989 at Weill Recital Hall in New York’s famed Carnegie Hall. Poore wanted a new group of songs to perform for this upcoming recital. To obtain an idea of the type of songs Poore favored and what kind of acting she preferred, Poore and Larsen discussed repertoire and the previous operas that Poore had performed. Poore added that she preferred the kind of dramatic presentation that Hugo Wolf allows.

Larsen continues her account in the interview to reveal that at the time of this commission, she was reading the 1927 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder and became intrigued by the relationship between two of the characters. The narrative includes the relationship between a mother and daughter in which the vain Spanish actress sadly mistreats her mother by refusing to return her letters.

Touched by the mother’s circumstances, but finding trouble in arriving at a suitable text, Larsen happened upon the letters by Calamity Jane to Janey, the daughter she never raised, in a book entitled *Between Ourselves*. Edited by Karen Payne, the book presents a compilation of letters between mothers and daughters. Finding the situations similar in content, Larsen preferred using “American English in its formative stages and in all of its stages.”6 The struggles and courage of the protagonist moved Larsen, urging her to chose the letters of Calamity and produce, in her own words, “virtually an operatic scene.”7 While the entire collection of letters has been published under Calamity’s

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6 Libby Larsen, Interview by the Author, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, 12 July 2003, 197. The transcription appears below in Appendix C.
formal name Martha Jane Cannary Hickok in *Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter*,\(^8\) Payne presents a shorter edition in her book.

Although many scholars have described *Songs from Letters* as either a song cycle or a monodrama, Larsen conceived the piece to be a *scena* for solo soprano and piano. “The pieces are, to my way of thinking, much more dramatic than traditional art song or *Lieder*. And while there is a grouping of songs, I consider them to all belong to each other, and it’s really more of a *scena* than it is a framed cycle.”\(^9\) While the term *scena* is usually reserved for a group of theatrical songs within an opera, Larsen justifies her use of this term. She adds “I’ve been toying around in my choral works and my operatic works, but really more and more in songs that I compose, wanting to make a complete visual listening experience, if at all possible, in the theater of the mind.”\(^10\) Further discussion of her use of this term will appear in the section entitled “Form, Structure, and Motives in *Songs from Letters*.”

**Second Version of *Songs from Letters***

Additionally, a second version of this work exists, which is for soprano and orchestra. Larsen recounts:

I decided to orchestrate the songs because I was making a recording with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and with Benita Valente. We were recording the *Songs of Light and Love*, which I had composed for her. And she and I were talking about what else might go on the recording, and we decided that *Songs from Letters* would work very well as an orchestrated *scena*.”\(^11\)

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\(^8\) Martha Jane Cannary Hickok, *Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter*, (Berkeley, CA: Shameless Hussy Press, 1976). This publication is not paginated.

\(^9\) Larsen, Interview by the Author, 196 in Appendix C.

\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Ibid.
In *Songs from Letters*, Larsen emphasizes the struggles and pleasures, which existed throughout Calamity Jane’s life. The loneliness associated with being a pioneer in the Old West pervades the *scena* as Calamity embarks on the discovery that “she was yearning to be the mother she couldn’t be,”¹² as Larsen states. Citing examples of repetition and expansion using key words and motives, I will analyze the themes, form, and structure through which Larsen presents the listener with Calamity Jane’s personal journey as she relates it to her daughter. Unique in her lyrical style, Larsen combines seemingly unrelated ideas and creates a perfect example of climax and dénouement. Lastly, the combination of new motives must be aurally redefined for the listener in the context of this poignant final section, which Larsen resolves with her distinctive style and grace. Larsen presents Calamity Jane as a pioneer with a rough exterior, but she peels away the layers to reveal a vulnerable, and oftentimes unhappy woman, who chose to work rather than to mother.

¹² Ibid., 200 in Appendix C.
Chapter 2. Calamity Jane

In order to fully understand Larsen’s *Songs From Letters*, the reader must first be aware of the text and its significance to Calamity Jane’s life. Accordingly, the reader benefits further if he or she is knowledgeable of Calamity’s history and legend. Because many accounts of Calamity’s life were passed by word of mouth, fact and fiction blur easily to become the stories of her legend. Furthermore, many documents during that period of American history were lost, misplaced, or processed in an insufficient manner. Understandably, authors chasing truthful biographical information about Calamity Jane have stumbled across numerous obstacles and disparate reports in their pursuit.

**The Life and Legend of Calamity Jane**

Oftentimes published details about Calamity Jane conflict. Concerning her birth, authors dispute the exact date and region in which she was born. Calamity’s own autobiography states that she was born in Princeton, Missouri on May 1, 1852.13 However, another popular version surfaces in biographies, including the biography authored by Roberta Beed Sollid, claiming that Calamity was born to an enlisted soldier as Jane Dalton at Fort Laramie, Wyoming in 1860.14 In her biography of Calamity Jane, Sollid dedicates fourteen pages to the contradictions found in the various accounts of the people who claimed to know Calamity and her life story. Sollid concludes that Calamity’s version remains the most accurate as can be proven by any form of historical documentation.

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Calamity’s maiden name provides another source of confusion surrounding her legend. Calamity Jane spells her maiden name “Cannary”\(^\text{15}\) in her autobiography. However, various sources also spell her maiden name “Canary.”\(^\text{16}\) In his biography of James (Wild Bill) Butler Hickok, Joseph G. Rosa gives little insight into the confusion of the spelling of her name. He explains that the “census for 1860 of Mercer County, Missouri, of which Princeton is the county seat, reveals that there were several families by the name of Conarrary, including one with two children, a sixteen-year-old girl M.J. (Martha Jane?), and a child of seven.”\(^\text{17}\) He concludes that the census writer used the phonetic spelling but points out that this would place Martha Jane Cannary’s birth year at 1844 rather than 1852.

Solld also wrote of the census document and the misspelling of Calamity Jane’s maiden name. However, more evidence must be considered. To further substantiate the date of Calamity’s birth year, Solld references a newspaper article, which was published in the *Montana Post* in December 1864. In this article, three sisters appeared at the door of a Mr. Ferus soliciting charity. The only detail in the article which conflicts with details in Calamity’s autobiography is the family name of the three girls. The publication records the last name “Canary”. Solld dismisses this mistake, giving no explanation.\(^\text{18}\) Because of her thorough research concerning the conflicting reports on Calamity’s birth date and town, I conclude that Solld was correct in believing Calamity’s autobiography and that the “Canary” spelling in the *Montana Post* was simply a mistake.

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\(^{15}\) Burk, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane by Herself* in *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, 125.


\(^{18}\) Solld, *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, 9-11.
Additionally, numerous stories abound on how she received her nickname. Calamity herself claims that she was stationed at Goose Creek Camp, Wyoming in 1872 and 1873 with Captain Egan and a small body of men. The Indians were causing a lot of trouble, and six soldiers were killed before the militia returned back to Post. The Captain was wounded, and he began to fall from his horse. Amidst the fighting, Calamity rode to his side in time to catch the captain before he fell. Calamity recounts in her autobiography: “I lifted him onto my horse in front of me and succeeded in getting him safely to the Fort. Capt. Egan on recovering, laughingly said: ‘I name you Calamity Jane, the heroine of the plains.” 19 Nonetheless, various personal accounts and historical documents prove this account to be untrue.

A more popular tale of her nickname surfaced in 1878. When a smallpox epidemic broke out in the South Dakota region of Deadwood that year, Calamity spent much of her time risking her life to nurse the victims back to health. According to a townswoman, “if anyone was sick in camp, it was, ‘send for Jane;’ where Calamity was, there was Jane; so she was christened Calamity Jane” 20 as a term of affection from the ailing sufferers.

Many published reports expose Calamity as a harsh and flamboyant spirit. After her family journeyed from Missouri to Montana in the mid-1870s, she became estranged from her parents. It is unclear whether her parents died or abandoned her and her siblings. Possibly a runaway, Calamity found work to support herself. With the exception of the narrative of Calamity helping with the smallpox epidemic, she is

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20 Sollid, *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, 60.
described in the worst of terms – as a hard drinking woman who wore men’s clothing, chewed tobacco, and used vulgar language.

Disparate reports also surround her various cohorts. Wild Bill Hickok (William Butler Hickok) tops the list. Sources agree that they met at or near Fort Laramie in 1876 and proceeded to Deadwood in June or July of that year with a party of three other people. However, this encounter may not have been their first. Calamity refers to Wild Bill only as a friend in her autobiography.21 Conversely, she states in the letter dated September 1880 in *Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter* that she and Wild Bill met in 1870 near Abilene. After a shootout between the duo and some outlaws, Calamity nurses Bill back to health. Subsequently, Reverend Sipes and Reverend Warren marry the legendary couple and have them sign a statement of marriage in lieu of an official marriage certificate. In the September 1880 letter, Calamity states to Janey her intentions to submit eventually the signed document to a printing company as Bill requested, which will produce a more official marriage certificate.22

She also refers to James Butler Hickok as Janey’s father in a lengthy letter dated July 25, 1893 adding that he left Calamity after Janey was born. Out of spite, Calamity let the O’Neil’s adopt their daughter.23 On August 2, 1876 Wild Bill was killed at the Nuttall and Mann saloon while playing a game of poker.24 The two legends knew each other, but no biographer’s account fully substantiates or disproves the precise nature of their relationship.

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22 Hickok, *Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter*.
23 Ibid.
24 Sollid, *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, 41-44.
On February 14, 1941 a Mrs. Jane (Janey) Hickok McCormick announced in an interview with Gabriel Heater that she was the daughter of Calamity Jane and Wild Bill.\textsuperscript{25} She held in her possession a diary and various documents as evidence. I believe this “diary” was in fact Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter Janey. The statement of marriage, written on a page torn from a Bible, records the marriage of the couple on their way to Abilene, Kansas in September 1870. The unofficial document contains a statement of marriage by Reverend Warren and is signed by two individuals, which historians and biographers have been unable to find. The Wild Bill Hickok biographer Joseph Rosa reveals a confession in Calamity’s letters stating that the James Butler Hickok she married was really the cousin of Wild Bill rather than the famed legend himself. However, various changes were made to the letters once McCormick’s story gained publicity.\textsuperscript{26} Sources agree that several inaccuracies disprove many assertions made by Mrs. McCormick. Nevertheless, she insisted upon the validity of the documents until her death in February 1951.\textsuperscript{27} It seems the discrepancies may never be resolved.

James O’Neil purportedly acted as a guardian and foster-father to young Janey Hickok. According to Rosa’s biography of Wild Bill Hickok, O’Neil befriended Calamity, and he and his wife eventually adopted her daughter Janey.\textsuperscript{28} Considering the discrepancies surrounding this account and the numerous inconsistencies concerning Janey McCormick, it must be taken on faith that Mr. O’Neil and Calamity were not in a grand conspiracy to deceive Janey and the entire world.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{26} Rosa, \textit{They Called Him Wild Bill: The Life and Adventures of James Butler Hickok}, 230.
\textsuperscript{27} Sollid, \textit{Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism}, 44.
\textsuperscript{28} Rosa, \textit{They Called Him Wild Bill: The Life and Adventures of James Butler Hickok}, 231-33.
Another name associated with Calamity Jane is Mr. Clinton Burk (with or without an “e”). In her autobiography *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane* dated 1896, he is the only man mentioned as a husband, and his name is spelled without the “e”. However, in *Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter*, Burke is spelled with the “e”. According to Calamity’s autobiography, they met in El Paso and married in August 1885. While she claimed to be the mother of a baby girl, born on October 28, 1887, and lived a quiet life in Texas until 1889, various newspapers report her activities in other parts of the country between 1884 and 1887. From 1890 until September 1895, little was published in the newspapers about Calamity. Finally the *Daily Independent* newspaper of Helena, Montana reported on September 18, 1896 that after leaving Minneapolis with Burk, Calamity visited the Montana town to sell her autobiography *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane by Herself*. The newspaper referred to her as Mrs. Clement Burk, rather than Mrs. Clinton Burk, and made no further mention of her husband. I imagine this is a misprint. Little more is known of the remainder of their liaison.

On August 1, 1903 Calamity Jane died of inflammation of the bowels, induced perhaps by prolonged overindulgence in alcohol. Sources state that she requested to be buried near Wild Bill. However, this dying wish may have been fabricated by romantics among her friends or others with a macabre sense of humor. Whatever the truth, Calamity rests in Mount Moriah cemetery approximately twenty feet from Hickok’s resting place. As with her life, the inconsistencies continue with her death. Some writers

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29 Burk, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane by Herself* in *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, 129.
30 Hickok, *Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter*, letters dated September 25, 1891 and January 20, 1901.
31 Sollid, *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, 50-53.
32 Ibid., 54.
34 Ibid., 234.
insist on publishing her death as August 2, twenty-seven years to the day after the death of Wild Bill. Another writer cites the year as 1906, placing her death exactly thirty years after Hickok’s own death.35

The Letters of Calamity Jane

Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter, written between 1877 and 1903, contain twenty-four written entries and provide more insight than many other books written about her. Of the biographers who believe the letters to be authentic, none is certain how Janey acquired the letters. While the biographer Sollid contends that the letters are fake, Dr. Nolie Mumey, a part-time historian and full-time physician, pursued the truth behind this document, and was first to publish the letters in 1950. No other biographers “contacted Mumey to determine the circumstances under which he came upon the letters or his considerable efforts to determine their authenticity,”36 according to music scholar Rosemary Killam’s 1993 article about Larsen’s Songs from Letters. Regardless, Mumey considered the letters to be accurate and true until his death in 1984. Additionally, Rosemary Killam, Karen Payne, Libby Larsen, and Janey Hickok McCormick all concur that the letters are authentic.

Harriet McCleary writes in her dissertation that the letters express the “sacrifices a parent, and in this case a mother, makes for her child.”37 The sensitivity Calamity so carefully hid from her public appears in each letter she wrote to Janey. Perhaps the world in which Calamity lived made it too dangerous to expose a weak or vulnerable side. In

35 Sollid, Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism, 110.
that society, she remained safest when protected by a hard outer image and her legendary status.

Comparable to a diary with dated entries, the letters begin with an undated note to Jim O’Neil asking him to give the letters to Janey after Calamity passes away. She notes outright that she did not intend the letters to be a diary and acknowledges that the collection may never reach her daughter. From these first sentences, Calamity exhibits hope while remaining realistic. Throughout the collection, Calamity refers to the various pictures that Jim has sent over the years, noting also the occasion when Calamity traveled east to finally see her daughter after years of being apart.

In a letter dated January 1882, Calamity refers to two teenagers who she helps feed and clothe. She writes of her money being gone because she helps some poor “fool” to eat. According to Calamity, “I always think of you darling and away goes my money.” Candid about her drinking, Calamity says it is to help her forget about Janey and her father. However, in her January 20, 1901 letter to Janey, Calamity admits to telling lies about her life story to a man named Mulog. She jibes, “The old fool. He said he would make some money for me for selling them.” Curious to discover if this reference is to her autobiography Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane by Herself, I noticed that the autobiography predates the Mulog letter by five years.

Calamity mentions a few of the various jobs she had throughout her life. In the letter dated January 20, 1901, she writes of a job riding the range near Fargo, and adds that when the job is through, she will be finished with Burke (with an “e”). This

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38 Hickok, Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
statement gives minimal evidence of the eventual termination of Calamity’s relationship with Burk. In that same letter, she admits she is going blind and fears the future. She doesn’t want death. No longer hopeful, she asks her daughter for forgiveness.

Despite Calamity’s lack of education and problems with literacy, the letters to Janey are remarkably well written. Taken as a group, the letters form a rich and coherent narrative. Editor Karen Payne presents only twelve letters in *Between Ourselves*, yet the narrative remains poignant. From this collection, Larsen obtained the material from which she fashioned her lyrics. Engaging in librettist-like duties, Larsen reshapes the letters herself.

Larsen describes her process of turning prose into lyrics in my interview with her. She sees her process as a sort of pruning or chipping away of the unnecessary words to reveal a text that wants to be highlighted through intonation. As she looks at each paragraph of prose, she underlines or circles words and eliminates everything else, so that the resulting text reveals only the essential words needed for the singer and audience. Her process seems very deliberate and calculated because of the details and explanations for certain word functions. Finding nouns and verbs to be more important than adjective and adverb phrases, Larsen handles the verbs with the utmost importance because that is where she finds the tempo and progression of the song. In the interview, Larsen states that “the nouns and the verbs will rise up off the page, and the adjectives and the adverbs will ask whether or not they really need to be set.”

Warning that a person must be careful when setting conjunctions, Larsen affirms that much meaning lies within these words. Oftentimes the conjunctions lead the listener to understand irony and the character of the speaker. She adds that in an explanation, an

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42 Larsen, Interview by the Author, 199 in Appendix C.
“and” clause will reveal a self-defense mechanism. Additionally, an “or” clause gives the audience clues to the committed nature of the person speaking the words. Secondary to this process is the search for a rhyming vowel pattern, or end rhyme, to employ. She adds that if she were setting a work by a poet from the Black Mountain School, she would need to consider the consonants rather than the vowels. For Larsen, this lengthy process occurs in order for the music to rise out of the words.  

Larsen also considers the time period, conventions, and education of the author who wrote the prose. Because Calamity Jane taught herself to read and write and lived in the Old West, Larsen sets the work in a pioneer locale complete with a piano to remind us of a saloon-like atmosphere. Maintaining the voice and the conditions of the original writer is very important so that Calamity’s memoirs are reflected through Larsen’s music.

Lyrics for the first three songs are drawn from a single letter dated September 1880. The fourth song combines text from five separate letters dated between 1884 and 1893. The final song is from a letter dated April 1902. However, the final line, “Good night little girl and may God keep you from all harm,” is taken from an earlier letter dated May 30, 1882. It is important to note that the excerpts Larsen chose highlight five aspects of Calamity Jane’s life. In her dissertation “The Solo Vocal Music of Libby Larsen,” Harriet McCleary observes the following:

The catalyst in this cycle is the pictures of Janey and her father, Wild Bill Hickok. The similarity between father and daughter causes Calamity to reminisce on her life (Song I). She met Wild Bill during a gunfight where Calamity is attracted to his manly skills and marvels at the fact that “Bill

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43 Ibid., 199-200 in Appendix C.
44 Ibid., 199-201 in Appendix C.
45 It is the last letter in Karen Payne, ed., Between Ourselves: Letters Between Mothers and Daughters 1750-1982, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983), 134; however it is the second-to-last letter in Martha Jane Cannary Hickok’s Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter.
killed them all!” (Song II). By Song III, after the relationship ends, Calamity counsels Janey that jealousy destroyed their love, that Bill still loved her (Calamity) “because of you, Janey.” By Song IV Calamity is on her own and working for a living. The listener is introduced to her many talents, such as stage coach driver, barmaid, sharp shooter, bare-back rider, and mid-wife. This earthy portrayal shows an angry woman who was not given respect by “proper” people, who was independent and on the outskirts of society. In the last song, Calamity is old and going blind. The pictures, which she can no longer see but tries to remember, give the cycle a retrospective framework.47

Larsen presents the songs as a story or biographical narrative. The songs resemble a short, dramatic opera for a single character. Briefly looking at the omissions made by Larsen results in further understanding of her narrative. Two entries by Calamity before and after a poker game merely relay how Calamity was able to afford to visit Janey and Jim O’Neil at that time. Larsen uses the final line of the entry dated 30 May 1882 in the final song, but omits the remainder of the letter. In this letter, Calamity reflects on her recent visit to New York and expresses her longing to be with her daughter. Calamity’s longing is established without including this text in the songs. Therefore, Larsen omits this portion of the letter. Likewise, the letter that mentions Janey’s birthday and Calamity’s marriage to Charley Burke is absent. The detail about this man is not important because, as Calamity states in the letter, she did not love Mr. Burke.48

Lastly, Larsen excludes two entries; one from 1896, and the other from 1898. Calamity writes of wanting a granddaughter, which is pointless to mention since Calamity prevents Janey from knowing the full extent of their relationship in Calamity’s lifetime. Also Calamity includes mention of the winter landscape surrounding her and how she is at the end of her rope. Including this information would have been redundant since the listener receives that information from the fifth song as Calamity is going blind.

Within this story-like structure, Larsen transforms the original text, as provided by Payne, into lyrics. Comparison of Larsen’s text with Calamity’s letters reveals a better understanding of this process. Below is a portion of the letter dated September 1880 as it appears in Payne’s *Between Ourselves*. While it was the fourth entry in Calamity’s original collection of letters, Payne omitted the first three letters and presented this letter first in her collection. The ellipses below designate the editing marks in Payne’s publication. Larsen creates the first song using portions of this text.

**September 1880**

Janey, a letter from your Daddy Jim came today and another picture of you. Your birthday is this month, you are seven years old. I like this picture of you … Your expression [is] exactly like your father’s….

Your picture brought back all the years I have lived without your father and I recalled how jealous I was of him.49

Below is Larsen’s text for the first song “So Like Your Father’s” complete with repetitions:

Janey, a letter came today and a picture of you.  
Your expression so like your father’s,  
like your father’s,  
brought back all the years.  
Janey, a picture of you…  
like your father’s,  
brought back all the years.50

Comparing these excerpts, one realizes that the importance of the picture lies in generating a memory of Bill for Calamity. Beyond the memory the picture creates, details of her age and her birthday are extraneous, and Larsen chooses to omit them. The first line “Janey, a letter came today and a picture of you” is repeated in the middle of the song. Larsen omits the reference to Daddy Jim to focus on the most important aspect of the text,

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49 Ibid., 130.  
50 Larsen, *Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey, 1880-1902*, np. Permission to reprint the copyrighted text has been obtained as is evidenced by the letter of permission in Appendix A.
namely Janey and her picture. Within the first half of the song, “so like your father’s”
bears repeating a second time because of the relation of her expression as compared to her
father’s. The focus is clearly on the father, rather than the expression and possibly even
Janey. This importance is further proven in the second repetition, when the expression is
no longer worth mentioning. Larsen chooses to have Calamity dwell on the father and
their past by relating Janey’s picture to him. Therefore, Janey and her picture are the
catalyst for the central issue, namely Calamity’s memory of Bill.

To better understand the connections that encase the lyrics of the five songs, I will
briefly describe the songs’ relationships to one another. The five songs combine to create
a balance between the odd-numbered and even-numbered songs. Larsen places dramatic
action portrayals of the parents in the even-numbered songs. This action includes a gun
fight between Bill and some outlaws (in Song II) and the account of Calamity’s various
occupations (in Song IV). Conversely, more reflective drama continues for Janey
through contemplative emotions such as Calamity’s memory, jealousy, love, pride, pity,
and sadness. This emotional drama appears throughout the entire scena but is most
apparent in Songs I, III, and V.

After selecting the text, another process involves chipping away at the selected
prose to expose the lyrics for the entire scena. Structure and balance play an important
role in this development. Larsen attains this balance by repeating certain poetic themes
and textual motives within each song, and throughout the entire work, in order to give the
listener a sense of continuity. Accordingly in Song I, the repetition of “Janey, a picture of
you” not only functions as a reiteration of this important formal feature within the song,
but also serves the listener with the poetic themes “Janey” and “picture” to establish a sense of continuity which will reverberate through the entire piece.

Many characters surface as poetic themes within the text besides Calamity Jane. Of the associates mentioned, the most important are Janey and Janey’s biological father Wild Bill Hickok. Basic descriptions of these people appear in preceding paragraphs. The thematic repetitions, which Larsen uses to establish a sense of continuity, include references to these characters, and the iterations are continually employed throughout the piece.

For example, the word “father” appears in the scena numerous times. In song four, “father” does not occur. However, the antithesis “mother” arises. In the second song about Hickok’s gunfight, “Bill” occurs many times as well as the words “him,” “his,” and “he,” which refer to Bill. As Bill remains an important figure to Calamity, these numerous repetitions are understandable.

Janey, another important character that we have discussed in conjunction with the first song, also occurs as a poetic theme. Always accompanied closely in the text with the word “you,” “Janey” only appears in the odd-numbered songs. Larsen demonstrates the importance of her three protagonists Calamity, Bill, and Janey by balancing the distribution of their names or references to their character throughout the five songs.

Similar repetition reveals the importance of an object rather than a character. As previously discussed, “picture” becomes significant in the first song. This word also appears in song five. The content of song five, and the repetition within it, proves very important. Calamity concerns herself with her own impending blindness. She affirms that
all she has left are her pictures. These photos aid in her memory of Janey. Once she cannot see the photos anymore, nothing will be left for her.

The following two excerpts are from Calamity’s prose as they appear in Payne’s collection of letters. This first excerpt appears as the final letter in Between Ourselves.

April 1902

Dear Janey,

I guess my diary is just about finished. I am going blind – can still see to write this yet, but I can’t keep on to live an avaricious old age. All hope is dead forever Janey. What have I ever done except to make one blunder after another? All I have left are these little pictures of you and your father. I can’t go on blind and the doctor told me yesterday that in two months I would be absolutely blind. O how I wish that I had my life to live over…

I hate poverty and Dirt and here I shall have to live in such in my last days. Don’t pity me Janey.
Forgive all my faults and the wrong I have done you.51

30 May 1882

…Good night little girl and may God keep you from harm.52

This second entry, which was added by Larsen to the end of Song V, is taken from the final sentence of the letter to Janey, which Calamity wrote after her New York visit to see her daughter and Mr. O’Neil. This visit to see her daughter was one of two that Calamity was fortunate enough to be able to take during her life.

Below is the text, including repetitions, of the fifth song “All I Have.” The repetition of “pictures” (in italic and bold face) confirms its importance as a poetic theme.

I am going blind.
All hope of seeing you again is dead, Janey.
What have I ever done except one blunder after another?
All I have left are these pictures of you,
You and your father,
pictures,
All I have,
pictures,
All I have, all I have, Ah

52 Ibid., 131.
I am going blind,
I am going blind.
Don’t pity me, Janey,
forgive my faults and all the wrong I did you.
Goodnight, little girl,
little girl,
Goodnight, little girl, and may God keep you from harm.53

Not only is this poetic theme repeated and balanced throughout song five, Larsen also creates a sense of balance with “pictures” in the structure or form of the overall *scena*. As discussed earlier, “father” and its antithesis “mother” combine to create a similar continuity in Songs II and IV, as does “Janey” in the odd-numbered songs. By repeating these poetic themes throughout the overall piece, Larsen fashions a sense of balance and continuity for the listener.

Repetition plays a similar role within each individual song. Certain lines return to direct readers back to points that Larsen finds important. More immediate repetitions, as well as extensions of these repetitions, create direct connections for the listener. Furthermore, these repeated lines can serve to delineate sections within a song. Regardless of tense, “love” arises eight times in song three. This word materializes more times than the character “father” in the overall work, establishing its importance to the song. The use of “you Janey” and “love” combine to create a textual motive and to bring out a balance. The text of song three illustrates how Larsen’s repetitions suggest groupings of lines and (as we shall see) a particular musical form. I have differentiated the text to show repetition.

*Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey.*

It kills love.
It kills love and all nice things.
*Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey.*
It drove your father from me.

I lost ev’rything I loved.
I lost ev’rything I loved.
I lost ev’rything I loved except for you.
A man can love two women,
love two women at a time.
He loved her and he still loved me because of you Janey.
because of you, Janey. 54

“Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey,” begins two of the three textual sections.
Because of this first line, the first two divisions appear to be similar. The three repetitions of “I lost ev’rything I loved” serve as a textual barrier between sections two and three. Notice “except for you” is added to the final repetition. However, “Janey” does not follow “you” for the first time in the song. This moment will certainly be important for our protagonist in the scena. The third division ends with a second repetition of “because of you, Janey” for dramatic emphasis. These last two occurrences of “you Janey” end the third section rather than begin it thus maintaining balance while avoiding monotony.

A similar pattern of repetition exists in song four. The text (including repetitions) appears below:

Your mother works for a living.
One day I have chickens, and the next day feathers.
These days I’m driving a stagecoach.
For a while I worked in Russell’s saloon.
But when I worked there all the virtuous women planned to run me out of town,
run me out of town,
all the virtuous women planned to run me out of town,
so these days I’m driving a stagecoach.
Your mother works for a living.
I’ll be leaving soon to join Bill Cody’s Wild West Show.
I’ll ride a horse bareback, standing up,
shooting my Stetson hat twice, throwing it into the air and landing on my head.
I’ll ride a horse bareback, standing up,
shooting my Stetson hat twice, throwing it into the air and landing on my head,
landing on my head.
These are hectic days, like hell let out for noon.

54 Ibid.
I mind my own bus’ness, but remember the one thing the world hates is a woman who minds her own bus’ness.
All the virtuous women have bastards and shotgun weddings.
I have nursed them through childbirth and my only pay is a kick in the pants when my back is turned.
These other women are potbellied, hairy legged and they look like something the cat dragged in.
I wish I had the pow’r to damn their souls to hell,
damn their souls to hell,
damn their souls to hell!

*Your mother works for a living.*

“Your mother works for a living” appears three times. At first glance it might seem that this textual motive could begin the three sections of the song. However, Larsen divides the three sections using the tense of the verbs. For the most part, the first and third sections occur in the present tense. The second section refers to the job Calamity will have in the near future. “These days” loosely serves as a secondary boundary between the sections. While “you, Janey” begins sections one and two and concludes section three within song three; “Your mother works for a living” begins and ends section one and ends section three within song four.

From Calamity’s letters as presented in Payne’s *Between Ourselves*, Larsen creates a lyrical version of the legend’s own words and emotions. Through repetition of poetic themes and textual motives, Larsen fashions Calamity’s collection of prose into a collection of songs, which give insight into events and Calamity’s own outlook on life. To further create a sense of balance for her listeners, repetition of one word is not always enough. Repeating entire lines of text places emphasis on ideas or people and often functions as boundaries between sections within songs. Larsen incorporates a sense of balance within the text. Her use of form, motives, and orchestration establishes a subtle organization, which gradually becomes more intricate as it envelops and unites the scena.

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55 Ibid.
Chapter 3. Form, Structure, and Motives in Songs from Letters

Libby Larsen creates emotion and drama in Songs from Letters. Chipping away the less significant words, Larsen condenses the letters of Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey. Calamity Jane’s legend now breathes a whisper of regret and delicate susceptibility through Larsen’s piece. Larsen states in the July 12, 2003 interview that she wants “to make a complete visual listening experience…in the theater of the mind.” She tries to create “an ecology for the delivery of the words that moves the listener…into a theater in their mind, which the listener is free to decorate in any way…shape, or form.”

Through repetition of certain poetic themes and textual motives, Larsen transforms Calamity Jane’s prose into a poetic presentation of emotional longing. The balance and structure Larsen creates cannot be found only within the text, she also uses musical motives to shape the form of each song. These musical motives recur and transform throughout the entire scena, and in the end, certain motives are recast to fit a new ecological space.

From the inception of this piece, both Larsen and Mary Elizabeth Poore intended to convey a very dramatic work to the world with this premiere. Because Larsen elevated the significance of drama, she considered the piece to be a scena as she was working on the composition. She considers the songs to be more dramatic than traditional art song or Lieder. Although there is a grouping of songs, which belong unto each other, the drama

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56 Larsen, Interview by the Author, 196 in Appendix C.
57 Ibid., 198 in Appendix C.
involved lends the work to be more of a scena than a framed cycle. To Larsen, this idea suggests a more complete visual listening experience.\(^{58}\)

According to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, in Italian opera, the *scena* “has the specific meaning of an episode which has no formal construction but may be made up of diverse elements.”\(^{59}\) Usually associated with an episode or scene within a larger work, such as an opera, the *scena* requires a flexible definition because no strict formal structure has been established. As the undercurrent of this piece tends to emphasize the protagonist’s passion through contemplative periods, the *scena*, while not a standard formal term, suits the characterization of this collection of songs formally. As Larsen states in the interview, the characterization she uses throughout her music creates “a psychological ecology for the delivery of the texts. And that makes them *scenas* and not *song cycles*….”\(^{60}\)

**Overall Structure**

Larsen alternates slower and faster tempos to create an overall structure for the *scena*. The odd-numbered songs are more contemplative episodes in slower tempos. As discussed in the previous section, these songs focus on Janey and on Calamity’s memory of Bill. Oftentimes, the catalyst is Janey’s pictures, although Calamity also focuses on other aspects such as jealousy and regret. The faster even-numbered songs, which create an effective contrast, present dramatic action portrayals of Calamity and Bill. By combining mood and tempo in alternation throughout the piece, both the singer and the listener receive a good balance of conflict and calm. As this dramatic fluctuation

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., 196 in Appendix C.  
\(^{60}\) Larsen, Interview by the Author, 199 in Appendix C.
presents contrast, Larsen creates more extreme examples of musical contrast and uses them as a recurring premise throughout the piece.

The length and relative proportions of the five songs are important to note. The first song “So Like Your Father’s (1880)” only lasts about a minute and a half. The subsequent three songs increase in length. Song five “All I Have (1902)” is only a few seconds shorter than song four, which lasts almost four minutes. Recalling that Larsen compiled the text of song four “A Working Woman (1882-1893)” from five letters, perhaps the fast tempo of this song serves two functions. A rapid tempo is appropriate for the portrayal of Calamity’s rage and frustration, and it also enables Larsen to place the lengthy text in a compact and powerful musical setting that includes the dramatic climax of the entire work.

One of the most important aspects of a piece of music is the timing of the climax. The idea of climax and dénouement harkens back to traditional Sonata form and enhances the drama Larsen creates. Oftentimes composers delay this moment until roughly two-thirds of the way through a work, which exhibits the calculation of the Golden Section. However, Larsen waits until four-fifths of the way through Songs From Letters, placing the primary climax four-fifths of the way through the fourth song. The climax occurs as Calamity works herself into a frenzy of anger toward her female antagonists. At the height of the drama, she repeats “damn their souls to hell” three times before regaining her composure and finishing the song.

Larsen anticipates this climax with smaller peaks presented in each individual song. While these peaks function as secondary highs, their existence is worth noting. I will mention each as I discuss the form and motives in each song. As Songs I and II
increase in length, Larsen places their climaxes later. Finally, when the principal climax of the entire scena occurs in Song IV, Larsen provides the release that the protagonist and audience have been longing to hear.

Naturally, to counterbalance this zenith, Larsen ends the scena with a melancholy nadir. “I am going blind” are the first words of the last song. This moment embodies the exact antithesis of Calamity’s rage. Her calm acceptance of blindness reflects sorrow where she once felt passion and a desire to condemn her adversaries. Asking for forgiveness, Calamity quietly bows to destiny, unable to fight anymore. In presenting such pathos directly after an angry climax, Larsen further accentuates the distance between the two extremes and uses their proximity to her advantage.

The following pages present analyses of Larsen’s Songs from Letters. For each song, a simple chart will illustrate the overall form, showing how Larsen’s musical setting supports and reflects her recasting of Calamity’s letters. I will demonstrate how Larsen employs musical motives to project recurring poetic themes, and how she employs musical repetition and variation to support formal designs suggested by the prose. Although Larsen does not employ traditional functional tonality in terms of any form of pre-composition, a degree of tonal centricity does operate within and throughout the scena, adding further continuity to the metrically unified whole. Certain moments in the piece suggest ambiguity in terms of the tonal centricity. However, the lyrical and emotional content supplies an explanation. Subsequent discussion will reveal the internal workings of each song and relate certain ideas and motives back to previous songs.

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61 Ibid., 201 in Appendix C.
Song I. “So Like Your Father’s (1880)”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
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<td>mm. 1-9</td>
<td>mm. 10-16</td>
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Figure 1. Form of Song I “So Like You Father’s (1880)”

“So Like Your Father’s (1880)” divides into two nearly equal portions, as illustrated in Figure 1. Each section begins with the word “Janey” and ends with “brought back all the years.” Larsen achieves an effective contrast by setting the opening text as unaccompanied recitative, but setting the varied return (mm. 10-11) of this text with accompaniment. As a further contrast, the words “brought back all the years” are accompanied by the piano in their first appearance (mm. 7-8), while their return at the close of the song has no piano accompaniment.

Figure 2 presents the primary motives. The Wedge Motive from the accompaniment of mm. 2-3 is named for the wedge-like shape it creates. The Wedge Motive exemplifies the use of extreme contrast, which Larsen utilizes as a recurring premise throughout the entire piece, via the extreme distance of registers. Presenting B octave-extremes five octaves apart, the Wedge Motive moves inward by contrary motion. As the Bs heard are an odd number of octaves apart, the axis of symmetry is F4. This note is also the highest note heard in the subsequent measure, which presents the Bell-Like Motive in the accompaniment. The performance instruction “warmly, bell-like” provides the motive with its name. In keeping with the recurring premise of contrast, the lower voice of the Bell-Like Motive contrasts two very short notes followed by a rather long note, accentuating extremes of rhythmic duration. This motive delivers the listener
to the ecological space Larsen described in the interview, and invites the audience to create a scene or space filled with thoughts and musings. For Rosemary Killam, this second motive “resonates with horses’ hoofbeats and bugle calls…reminding us that Calamity Jane was both an expert rider and reputed to have worked as a scout in the army.”

Figure 2. Wedge Motive and Bell-Like Motive in Song I

Two additional motives appear in Figure 3. Both motives contain a quarter-note triplet. However, the melodic shape of the triplet motives is not the same. One quarter-note triplet occurs over the text “so like your” and refers to Janey’s expression which Calamity remarks as being like her father’s. I will refer to this triplet figure as the Father Motive because of the subsequent word “father” in the text. The Father Motive functions as a reflection or extension of “picture of you.” This other triplet figure will be referred to as the Picture Motive. Figure 3 illustrates the resemblance of the two motives.

Because the picture reminds Calamity of Janey’s likeness of Bill, Larsen presents “so like” and “picture” together with a triplet motive. This comparable Father Motive contains a falling major third followed by a rising major third. Just as a reflection or

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63 Permission to reprint the copyrighted music has been obtained as is evidenced by the letter of permission in Appendix A.
memory is unlike a picture or the real image, the triplet motives are heard as being similar and related, but not identical.

Figure 3. Picture Motive and Father Motive in Song I

“So Like Your Father’s (1880)” suggests an F tonal center. This centricity discloses itself for the first time in m. 4 as F is the highest and lowest pitch presented in the Bell-Like Motive. The soprano melody then echoes the pitches of the Bell-Like Motive using a different rhythm. The melody in the subsequent measure again begins on F and adds an E to the motive. Both soprano motives end on B, which, as the tritone of F, creates instability. More discussion of the soprano melody in mm. 4-5 will appear in subsequent paragraphs.

Throughout the song, the accompaniment fluctuates between B and Bb during which F is supported by the Bb-F whole notes in the Bell-Like Motive. However, B appears throughout the vocal line, which never uses Bb. Additionally, all of the soprano phrases end on B, with the exception of the last. The Bs present in the vocal line and at the beginning of each statement of the Wedge Motive create an active tritone dissonance against the F tonal center. However, Bb provides stable support for the F because it creates a perfect fifth.

Soprano phrases support the centricity Larsen creates. In m. 4, shown in Figure 4, the active F-C-G portion of the Bell-Like Motive serves as a mirror (although not a rhythmically literal augmentation) in the soprano voice. A recomposed expansion of the vocal line (m. 4) follows in m. 5. Two soprano phrases ending in m. 1 and m. 8 seem to
pass the B at the end of the phrase to the Wedge Motive in the accompaniment. In essence, the motive frames the voice’s phrase, which extends from mm. 4-8. The Wedge Motive, in presenting the B octave-extremes, uses the B to play against the F tonal center as its antithesis, the tritone. Another important tritone (Ab-D) appears in the soprano voice as the first interval heard in m. 1, implying uncertainty.

Figure 4. Repetition and expansion of the Bell-Like Motive in soprano in Song I

Further analysis of the soprano’s musical motives reveals subtle construction. The word “Janey” is set to the same rhythm and pitch each time it occurs. The textual motive “picture” presents itself twice in the Picture Motive. While the two occurrences of the Picture Motive have the same rhythm and contour, they do not employ the same notes. Rather than a stepwise descent spanning a minor third as in m. 1 of Figure 3, the varied restatement in m. 11 uses two minor thirds, outlining the F-B tritone. These minor thirds are marked by circle 1 in Figure 5 below. Additionally, the F in the vocal line serves as the climax of this song.

The minor third F to D in the top voice of the accompaniment (circle 2 in m. 10 and circle 3 in m. 11) relates to the minor thirds in both repetitions of the Picture Motive and aides the soprano in the climax of the song. In m. 11, Larsen presents a variation of
the Bell-Like Motive in the accompaniment. The new F to D leap inverts the minor third from the top voice and resolves stepwise to C. This major sixth is marked by circle 4 in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Minor thirds, their inversion, and restatements of motives in Song I

Larsen repeats the Father Motive in m. 12, but she places the figure in the left hand accompaniment as Calamity tapers off from her thought of Bill and is unable to finish her idea (circle 5 in Figure 5). When Calamity finally sings the Father Motive in the second section of this song (mm. 13-14), the motive maintains the same pitches and contour, but the triplet rhythm is now replaced by longer note values.

To close both sections, “brought back all the years” contains the same rhythmic and intervallic structure with the exception of the final note. In m. 8 the vocal phrase ends on a B, which leads smoothly to a repetition of the Wedge Motive. The B continues the F-B tritone, which has appeared throughout the entire song. In mm. 15-16 “brought back all the years” resolves on an E, suggesting tonal ambiguity. The tonal center of the second song is E. Perhaps Calamity as a character wants to move on from the loneliness of the melancholy reflection of Bill, and the concluding note of the song reflects her desire to move on and speak of happier times. Combined with Larsen’s consistent use of passing the soprano phrase endings on B and the Father Motive to the accompaniment,
this lack of resolution to F serves as further conveyance that Calamity’s memory of “all the years” continues to be incomplete and biased. In other words, Larsen expresses musically the lack of closure that Calamity feels toward her relationship with Bill.

**Song II. “He Never Misses (1880)”**

While the first song introduces Calamity’s recollection of Bill, the memories in the second song “He Never Misses (1880)” center on more specific details. Like the first, this song divides into two nearly equal portions, demonstrated in Figure 6. In terms of form, two line repetitions emerge. They include: “I crawled through the brush to warn him” and “Bill killed them all.” Larsen uses these line repetitions to give shape to the song, and further, to reinforce the form through musical repetition and sequencing. Subsequent paragraphs present discussions of these portions of the song.

Aside from these textual and musical repetitions, two motives play an important role in Song II. The opening ostinato (in Figure 7) functions as the first musical motive presented and sets the groundwork for the beginning of both sections of the song. The meter $\frac{6 + 2}{8}$ aids in the three-versus-two proportion that Larsen creates in the overall form of the piece.

In the interview with Larsen, she discusses this opening motive as an example of the characterization present in the music. Larsen remarks that this motive might represent the gallop of a horse, but more accurately presents the asymmetry of movement
that accompanies a group of people who were trying to settle a new land for their families. She points out that in the days of the pioneers when Calamity lived there were no surfaces for a wheel to roll smoothly along. The opening ostinato conveys a “makeshift, ramshackle attempt to make a life in the West using tar paper, the only piano in town, and maybe one mahogany beam that somebody brought, you know, in their covered wagon, putting it together and that becomes the music hall.”64 This description provides a glimpse into the psychological ecology in which she places the piece for her audience. Additionally, Larsen establishes that she concerns herself with the time and place of the Old West rather than just the immediate action surrounding Calamity and Bill in this song. The opening ostinato appears below.

![Opening ostinato in Song II](image)

Figure 7. Opening ostinato in Song II

A second motive in the accompaniment first appears in m. 4. Resembling the Bell-Like Motive in Song I, this new motive consists of a single short note followed by a rather long note. The proximity and difference between the short note and the subsequent long note adds rhythmic contrast to the various forms of contrast Larsen employs in the scena. Since Larsen notes the direction in her score “as if shooting a Colt .45,” I will call this the Shooting Motive. An addition to the Shooting Motive is the adapted Shootout Motive which is first heard in m. 28. Both motives appear in Figure 8 below.

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64 Larsen, Interview by the Author, 198 in Appendix C.
In the Shooting Motive, the short note followed by the long note could represent the echo of a gunshot as it rings out over the wide-open plains. Also, I imagine the Shooting Motive as occurring with pairs of shots, from two separate guns. Old movies rarely portray the heroes and villains of the Wild West saving their rounds in a sparing manner. The protagonist shoots with one hand and then the other. Larsen always writes two or more “shots” in succession. In m. 27 she notes in the score “fling your arms as if toting six shooters.” This motive represents Bill shooting the outlaws to perfect detail. Furthermore, the shots in the second half of the song number exactly twelve. Larsen even gives Bill time to reload between the first “Bill killed them all” and when the shooting begins again in the second half of the song.

Overall, the song presents an E tonal center while the second half presents an F# departure, followed by a return to E. First heard in the ostinato at the beginning of the song, E also presents itself as the highest note in the first phrase of the vocal line. However, E is most prominent when it appears in m. 8 beneath the original ostinato. Subsequently, E supports the members of an E major chord. The chord gradually fades into an open perfect fifth. Musically, this augmentation and diminution of the chord
occurs underneath the vocalist as she sings, “I crawled through the brush to warn him,” and in the repetition in the first half of the song.

The two-measure codetta (mm. 22-23) completes the transition from E to F#. Singing “Bill killed them all,” the soprano begins on F, moves down through B and C, and completes the phrase on an F#. This can be seen in the comparison of the two “Bill killed them all” repetitions found in Figure 9. It is important to note that the B-F tritone, which was important in Song I, finds significance again. Subsequently, a second tritone (C-F#) occurs. Below this phrase, the accompaniment displays another example of Larsen’s use of contrast through extreme registers, via two Fs an octave apart above two Ebs an octave apart. The lowest F and highest Eb are three octaves and a major second apart and remind the listener of the dramatic effect of the Wedge Motive from Song I. Not only are the extreme registers of the piano exposed, but also Larsen marks the passage with a ritard for additional emphasis.

Figure 9. Comparison of “Bill killed them all” in Song II

In the second half of the song, the F on “Bill killed them all” (m. 38) functions as the climax of the song. Additionally, Larsen includes two subtle differences in the accompaniment of “Bill killed them all” during this second iteration. Rather than voicing
two Ebs an octave apart, she uses a diminished octave one octave higher. Therefore, the distance between the lowest F and highest Eb shortens to two octaves and a major second. In essence, the distance in the accompaniment of Song II forms a wedge to simulate the Wedge Motive in Song I. The second difference Larsen uses occurs in the vocal line. The tritones are replaced by a perfect fourth followed by a minor sixth.

As previously stated, the tonal center shifts from E to F# on m. 24 in the second half of the song. The ostinato remains; however, the first note heard in the accompaniment is an F#, presented up a major ninth. Accordingly, the entire ostinato continues in this higher register. It is important to note that in Figure 10 the upper voice accompaniment presents the inversion (a perfect fourth) of the ostinato in the first portion of the song (shown in Figure 7). Likewise, the lower voices present the inversion (a minor seventh). The F# in the soprano further supports the new tonal center. In the following measure, the support continues in the form of a sustained F# half note, enhancing the centricity maintained in the ostinato. After the Shootout Motive in m. 28, the ostinato figure continues into m. 30. Larsen recomposes the motive, only leaving the F# in its original and very powerful position – on the downbeat.

Figure 10. Recomposed ostinato and F# centricity in Song II
This F# placement on the downbeat aids in maintaining the tonal center throughout this section until the lower voice of the accompaniment breaks from the ostinato in an attempt to lead the tonal center back to E. Larsen accomplishes this in m. 37 through the F to F# motion, which leads to the E on the downbeat of “Bill killed them all” in mm. 38-39. The thwarting F# on “all” in m. 39 (see Figure 9) is explained later.

Besides the “Bill killed them all” repetition, another important sectional repeat includes “I crawled through the brush to warn him.” In the first half of the song, Larsen presents the longer notes of the first repetition up a major third. The beginning note of this repetition begins on the last note (enharmonically spelled) of the original voicing. Just as the accompaniment repeats the Father Motive in Song I, the accompaniment echoes, “I crawled through the brush to warn him” as a third repetition, which is up a minor third from the previous repetition.

Sequences persist in the second half of the song. “I crawled through the brush” begins up a half step from the original statement. Larsen reuses the interval of a major third between “crawled” and “brush,” and spells the interval enharmonically as a diminished fourth. Larsen omits a third repetition in the accompaniment for the sake of brevity. As the sequence preserves the interval of a third (regardless of the interval’s quality) throughout each repetition, Larsen maintains an increase in tension throughout each phrase until “Bill killed them all” in mm. 38-39.

The postlude, which begins in m. 40, expands the Shootout Motive in two measures labeled “the final shootout.” Figure 11 below shows how Larsen incorporates the ostinato from the first section of the song, as well as the tritones from “Bill killed them all.” F#s pervade the final shootout section because of their previous function in the
ostinato and “Bill killed them all” tritones. Prevalent F#s from “Bill killed them all” (m. 39) and the final shootout section, imply that order was not restored with the E in the lower voices of the accompaniment in the previous m. 38 or m. 41.

Figure 11. The final shootout section in Song II

The return to the original ostinato in the last three measures of the song establishes the final tonal center after the shootout as E rather than F#. Additionally, the ostinato provides a return to the ecology in which it was first presented. Regardless of the surroundings that decorate each audience member’s individual theater in their mind, a return to the happiness in the beginning of the song provides a release from the tension present in the final shootout section.

**Song III. “A Man Can Love Two Women (1880)”**

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<td>mm. 1-11</td>
<td>mm. 12-22</td>
<td>mm. 23-28</td>
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<td>mm. 29-39</td>
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Figure 12. Form of Song III “A Man Can Love Two Women (1880)”

The third song “A Man Can Love Two Women (1880)” introduces a three-part form, evident in Figure 12. As discussed above, “Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey,”
begins the first two sections of this song. Musically, these two sections are similar in style, mood, and length. The song ends with a contrasting third section. To aid in dictating the form of the song, Larsen uses textual repetition in three instances to provide sectional barriers. Musical repetitions support the textual repetition, “Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey.” Both melodic lines match exactly. However, the mood becomes increasingly fierce in m. 12 when the dissonant interval in the accompaniment replaces the open and consonant interval used in m. 5. Figure 13 illustrates the contrasting iterations.

![Figure 13. Comparison of “Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey” in Song III](image)

The three-fold repetition of “I lost ev’rything I loved” separates the end of section two from the beginning of section three. Each repetition of this text begins with the same two notes. Unlike the literal repetition for “Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey,” the melody and rhythm undergo a process of metamorphosis. Each occurrence creates more tension than the last by raising the intervallic distance between the beginning and end of each phrase, creating an effective peak for the climax of the song. This technique is similar to the sequential treatment of “I crawled through the brush to warn him” in Song II.
Another repetition occurs near the end of the song. Larsen repeats “because of you, Janey” at the close of the song. While the basic rhythm for “Janey” is the same as heard in the previous sections of the song, the shape of the melody differs. As in Song I, “Janey” remains entirely on one note. The interval between “you” and “Janey” is down a major third, as shown in Figure 14 below. This motion differs from the motion and interval heard for “Janey” in the first two repetitions from the beginning of the song (Figure 13). A minor third, from an E up to a G, represents the mood of loss and jealousy. Larsen maintains this minor third in the overall phrase “because of you Janey” as the phrase moves from an E, up to the G and B, then back down to the repeated G of “Janey.” Additionally, this final phrase supports the G tonal center. Subsequent paragraphs discussing the tonal center appear below.

![Figure 14. “Because of you, Janey” in Song III](image)

In terms of form, the text “you” and “Janey” combine to signal the beginning of the first two sections of Song III. As discussed with Figure 14, “you, Janey” heralds the end of the final section of the song. The only occurrence of “you” not followed by “Janey” signals the end of the second section and the beginning of the third. At this point, “you, Janey” shifts from functioning as a signal for a new section within the form and instead functions as an indication for the end of a section. Musically, Larsen creates a subtle difference between the two textual signals of form, as described above, through the melodic construction associated with “you, Janey.”
Two basic motives are expanded in Song III. The Calm Motive and the Fierce Motive, shown below in Figure 15, receive their names from the instructions noted in the score. Larsen describes the Calm Motive in the interview and refers to it as the sighing motive. As is evident from their names, the two motives preserve the thematic idea of contrast, so I choose to maintain the name with this first descriptive distinction. Larsen describes the Calm Motive in the interview as one played on a guitar, a banjo, or a similar plucked instrument: it is intended to evoke the hand-held instruments that really settled the West. The Calm Motive presents a hidden G triad as the D-B (m. 1 left hand) moves from the outer voice to the inner voice, resolving on the G.

More important than the triad is an inversional axis of symmetry, which confirms its importance in the previous two songs. This Eb-D symmetry becomes dually significant. In the second section of the song (mm.12-22), Larsen uses the chord to create tension in the accompaniment of “Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey” (Figure 13, m.12). This tension greatly contrasts the first time the listener hears this line. Dissonant and fortissimo, the minor second juxtaposes the previous quiet occurrence in m. 5, which presents a consonant octave plus a minor sixth underneath the recitative. A second Eb-D inversional axis of symmetry becomes important later.

The Fierce Motive has three compositional guises. Larsen introduces the first form in m. 3 (illustrated below in Figure 15) offering a series of descending short notes in the accompaniment. If the Calm Motive evokes the plucked instruments of the Old West, the Fierce Motive embodies music that is more idiomatic for the piano. To further the development of contrast, dynamic extremes enhance the accompaniment, pairing the

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65 Ibid., 198-9 in Appendix C.
66 Ibid., 199 in Appendix C.
Calm Motive with *piano* or *mezzo piano* and the Fierce Motive with *fortissimo*. Jealousy versus love, fast notes against relatively longer notes, loud against quiet, calm against rage – all combine to extend the contrasts Larsen presents in the previous two songs. In terms of form, the Fierce Motive functions to offset the first two sections from the third, in which calm prevails.

![Figure 15. Calm Motive and Fierce Motive in Song III](image)

The Eb-D symmetry becomes more prominent in the second section of the song. Throughout this section, Larsen expands the Fierce Motive, which is varied from that heard in the beginning. An example of the expanded Fierce Motive appears below in Figure 16.

![Figure 16. Wedge to axis of symmetry in expanded Fierce Motive in Song III](image)
In constructing this motive, Larsen switches the relatively long note and the short note in the beginning of the measure. Rather than continue with quintuplets, she replaces them with septuplets or triplets followed by septuplets. Furthermore, she adds the left hand in the piano to allude to the Wedge Motive heard in the first song. The Fierce Motive coincides with the text “I lost ev’rything I loved.” A chromatic cluster above C# appears at the end of the accompaniment phrase. The axis of symmetry within this cluster is Eb-D. Additionally, the last four notes in the septuplet lead by half step to the cluster and the axis of symmetry. Although the Calm Motive and expanded Fierce Motive contrast, the Eb-D axis of symmetry appears in both motives. This similarity among so many differences might represent a third emotion. To accompany Calamity’s calm and fierce expressions, the Eb-D axis of symmetry may represent Bill’s love, which Calamity questions up to this point. Musically, his love reveals itself later, as explained in subsequent paragraphs.

Twice the Fierce Motive appears in a shortened version (mm. 7 and 14). The rhythm consists of four notes – short, long, short, and relatively longer. The intervallic structure applies two diminished octaves in succession. The longer notes are F and E, which are the tonal centers of the previous two songs and are a major seventh apart. This interval is the inversion of the minor second whole notes (Fig. 13, m. 12) and dotted half notes (Fig. 15, m. 3) that precede the Fierce Motive in the first section of this song and the shortened version of the Fierce Motive (labeled below in Figure 17).

Also evident in the Figure 17 is that the two occurrences of the shortened version of the Fierce Motive occur in conjunction with the word “it.” “It” refers to Calamity’s jealousy. The jealousy killed love, and the jealousy drove Bill from her. I believe these
shortened versions to be briefer outbursts of rage compared with those associated with
the more complete Fierce Motive.

![Figure 17. Comparison of shortened Fierce Motives in Song III]

In the beginning of the song, Calamity has a few outbursts of anger associated
with jealousy. The rage builds throughout the middle of the song until the Bb peak in m.
20, where Calamity begins to regain her composure. Both of these sections are eleven
measures in length. The third section divides into two parts, the last of which is also
eleven measures. In this section Calamity comes to terms with the reality that jealousy
gets a woman nowhere. Bill loved Calamity regardless of her jealousy. Her expression
of anger stands as the final thing that drove Bill from her. With this realization comes a
calmer demeanor. Therefore, the Larsen omits the Fierce Motive from the final section.

Offering the tonal center G, Larsen exploits the leading tone and the tritone to
create tension. This tonal center hides in the voicing in the opening measures of the
Calm Motive (Figure 15). Larsen waits until m. 5 (Figure 13) to place the G in the bass,
and two octaves higher in the soprano. This opening phrase begins and ends on G.
However, she again buries the G in the accompaniment in the remainder of this section.
Finally in mm. 29-30, the G triad becomes most evident in the soprano as she sings “still loved me” (Figure 18). The major chord accentuates the relief in Calamity’s realization of Bill’s love for her. This realization exposes something that Calamity knew all along but could not see. While hidden and misunderstood at the time, the love Bill felt (and the G triad) presented itself from the very beginning. In the opening measure, the G triad hides within the Calm Motive.

![Figure 18. “Still loved me” G triad in Song III](image)

After this strong G returns in m. 30, the final soprano phrase ends on the same G, and the bass of the accompaniment echoes the contour as well. The concept of echoing an important melodic line from the text in the accompaniment again reveals itself at the very end of the song in the depths of the bass. As for the division within this last section, the final eleven measures begin with the soprano singing the G triad on “still loved me.” The consistent inclusion of the Calm Motive, which the listener has not heard since the first section of the song, enhances the beauty of Calamity’s poignant revelation.

**Song IV. “A Working Woman (1882-1893)”**

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![Figure 19. Form of Song IV “A Working Woman (1882-1893)”](image)

The form of the fourth song “A Working Woman (1882-1893)” resembles Song III simply because Larsen uses a three-part form. Rather than waiting until the end to
introduce a contrasting section as in Song III, she presents a contrasting middle section and concludes with a varied return to the beginning, as illustrated in Figure 19. The text dictates the three-part form because the first and third sections are both written in the present tense while the middle section is in the future tense. In this middle section Calamity sings of the job she will be doing in the near future.

The first section begins and ends with the line “Your mother works for a living.” The third section only ends with “Your mother works for a living.” However, Larsen balances the song by placing a portion of a musical quote (mm. 42-43) of this line in the accompaniment in the beginning of the third section. A precedent was set in Song I, m. 12 with the Father Motive in the accompaniment. The main reason for this new motive’s quote is to create balance. This musical quote and a more complete version of the quote will be discussed later in the paper.

Larsen introduces three new motives in Song IV, including the opening lyrics discussed above. Two motives correlate to the lyrics sung by the soprano. The opening line, “Your mother works for a living,” outlines a G major chord. For the sake of brevity, I will shorten this name to the Working Mother Motive. The second motive in the vocal line relates to the text “These days I’m driving a stagecoach” (mm. 8-10). Larsen cleverly hides a rhythmically altered Working Mother Motive in the accompaniment. Also in the accompaniment are the falling thirds that reflect the soprano line. This will be the Stagecoach Motive. Both motives appear in Figure 20 below.

It is important to note that this hidden Working Mother Motive appears in the bass voice in the right hand. Its appearance here rather than in the left hand provides the audience with the visual effect of having the pianist cross the right hand over the left in a
dramatic fashion. The audience will notice this visual effect, which may also result in the listener hearing the motive. The effect of the pianist reaching to cross hands for these measures corresponds to the visual drama that Larsen creates for her audience throughout the *scena*.

![Figure 20. Working Mother Motive and Stagecoach Motive from Song IV](image)

A third motive develops in the accompaniment in the fourth song. After the first two soprano phrases, Larsen introduces a jaunty measure (m. 7) that she notes in the score as being reminiscent of a tack piano (see Figure 21 below). Larsen describes this motive in the interview and refers to it as the Tack Piano Motive. She explains that the downbeat of this motive is mostly on white keys because of the more simple tonal structure of the music heard in that period of the Old West. Unlike the German functional keyboard harmony taught in the academy, the music heard in the music halls and mining tents of the West mainly consisted of folk songs performed by ear, and the filigree work was mostly played on the white keys. There was not much need to modulate. This motive conveys the uncomplicated tonal structure of the folk songs played on the hurdy-gurdies, guitars, and pianos of that time in the Old West.⁶⁷ For this

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⁶⁷ Ibid., 201 Appendix C.
reason, Larsen writes the motive simply using chromatic lower neighbor embellishments.

In terms of the ecology that she creates for her listeners through her music, the Tack Piano Motive places her audience in a local bar or playhouse as the visiting troubadour talent creates the only legal form of entertainment for a small Western town.

Another variation of the Tack Piano Motive appears measures later in m. 15 when Calamity describes how the virtuous women want to run her out of town. Both versions appear in Figure 21. In this variation the soprano joins the accompaniment on the wavering sixteenth-note figure for “run me out of town.” This occasion is the first time a piano motive transfers to the vocal line. Previously the accompaniment has echoed the lines “so like your father’s” in Song I, “because of you, Janey” in Song III, and “Your mother works for a living” in Song IV. Appropriately, each echoed line serves as the title or a closely related theme for each of the three songs.

Larsen again varies this motive by keeping the original wavering sixteenth figure on the downbeat in the accompaniment for mm. 17 and 18 while Calamity sings a rhythmically augmented version in eighth notes a third higher on “run me out of town.” Below, Figure 22 illustrates this rhythmic augmentation.
Figures 21 and 22 illustrate three versions of the Tack Piano Motive. In m. 7, the highest note of the motive begins on B. In m. 15, the highest note begins on C, and in m. 17, the highest note begins on E. Other versions of the Tack Piano Motive occur in which the highest notes being on A, D, and G#. With the exception of G#, the motives begin on white notes, and Larsen does not modulate to move throughout these occurrences, as she states in the interview. Later, the numerous versions of the Tack Piano Motive gain importance as Larsen moves toward the climax of the piece.

In addition to these new musical motives, Song IV contains several musical references to Songs I and II. The first reference begins as a quote of the Wedge Motive in mm. 2-4. Larsen alters the note values slightly and modifies the fourth interval in the motive to include other notes within the chord. Figure 23 below illustrates the first occurrence of the Wedge Motive as it appears in Song I and the Wedge Motive as it appears in Song IV. (With the exception of the B grace note leading to the high F on the first interval, both occurrences of the Wedge Motive in Song I are identical.)

As in Song I, a number of soprano phrases end on B in this song. Four of the seven soprano phrases end on B. Most importantly of these phrases are the Working
Figure 23. Wedge Motives from Songs I and IV

Mother Motive and the Stagecoach Motive. Another phrase that ends on B begins the second section of Song IV (mm. 23-25). The soprano phrase begins on Ab and ends on B. This calls to mind the motive Calamity sings for “Janey…a picture of you” in Song I. The two phrases appear in Figure 24. An additional resemblance is the recitative style in which both phrases are sung.

Figure 24. Similar soprano phrases from Songs I and IV

The Shooting Motive, which Larsen features in Song II, returns in the second section (mm. 23-32). Unlike Song II where Calamity gets ten shots off before having to reload for the final twelve, in this song she shoots nine, reloads, and finishes with five shots.
The G tonal center first establishes itself with the Working Mother Motive. Also, the G begins and ends the first two phrases of the song. Numerous soprano phrases maintain the G as the song’s tonal center. The middle (mm. 8-10) and end (mm. 18-20) of the first section confirm this centricity with the G pedal tone stretching as Calamity sings the Stagecoach Motive (Figure 20). The fourth song is the longest and most complex of the group. Additionally, it is the only song that moves to another key at its close. Rather than ending in G, Song IV ends on F with the soprano singing the Working Mother Motive at the tritone below its initial statement. It is important to recall that Song I ends on B with F as the axis of symmetry. This detail adds to other resemblances previously described regarding Songs I and IV.

As previously stated, the Working Mother Motive begins and ends the first and third sections of the song, creating formal balance. However, another quote of this motive appears in the accompaniment at the end of the second section. The quote occurs in mm. 37-38 in the lower voice. It is important to note that the pianist must cross hands for these measures, which adds to the drama and may result in the audience being more aware of the quote. The second Working Mother Motive that appears in the accompaniment occurs in octaves above a B pedal tone in mm. 42-43. Although this second quote delineates the form of the song because it occurs in the beginning of the third section, it may go unnoticed by the audience. This may occur because the quote is a major second higher than the original quote and is an augmentation of the original rhythm (Figure 20). Therefore, it does not appear in the original form. Additionally, no dramatic effect by the pianist, such as crossing hands, calls attention to the quote. Below, Figure 25 illustrates both quotes.
Larsen places the more recognizable quote of the Working Mother Motive at the end of the second section rather than at the beginning of the third section to blur the sectional boundaries. The audience hears this blurring effect throughout the piece. Particularly, Larsen exploits this technique in the second song as Calamity sings “I crawled through the brush” in Song II.

In terms of formal structure, Larsen reuses another aspect of Song I in Song IV. She applies the pairing of unaccompanied voicing and accompanied voicing to the Working Mother Motive. Larsen sets the first and last appearances of this motive unaccompanied. The only instance in which Larsen presents the Working Mother Motive with accompaniment is at the end of the first section (mm. 21-22). In the beginning of the third section, this motive appears in the accompaniment itself. This comparison of Songs I and IV becomes clear in Figure 26 below. In the last row the abbreviation “unacc.” means unaccompanied soprano while the abbreviation “acc.” means accompanied soprano.

To unify the contrasting second section, Larsen employs the Tack Piano Motive as Calamity sings “landing on my head” (m. 30) on the same notes as heard in m. 15 (Figure 21). However, Calamity only sings “landing on my head” one time in m. 30.
The return in m. 35 matches the accompaniment of m. 17, and Calamity repeats “landing on my head” twice at the original sixteenth-note rhythmic value. The accompaniment of this measure and m. 36 repeat mm. 17-18 faithfully to give the listener a sense of balance.

The Tack Piano Motive also appears in the third section of the song. Imitating the rhythmic augmentation of “run me out of town,” Larsen again creates a dramatic effect. However, this time Calamity sings “when my back is turned.” These words occur on C-B, which is the original transposition of “run me out of town” and “landing on my head.” In Figure 27 below, the accompaniment imitates the wavering minor seconds with an augmented rhythm rather than employing the jumping octaves in the lower voices.

Additionally, the lower voices in sixths present the inversion of the third heard in this motive thus far.

The dramatic effect continues up a major second each time (mm. 59-60) as Calamity “damns their souls to hell.” With her final exclamation, Larsen places the soprano up an augmented fifth from the original version and uses double the rhythmic augmentation. To further the drama, the accompaniment pounds out wide leaps, stretching the overall range. The climax in this song also serves as the zenith of the entire piece. As a final expression within the climax, Larsen inserts the Working Mother Motive in the highest
voice of the accompaniment and places the mirror inversion in the lowest voice in m. 63.

Figure 28 presents the climax.

A last impression of the Tack Piano Motive appears in the postlude of Song IV in m. 65. The accompaniment reflects the “damn their souls to hell” double rhythmic augmentation. The motive focuses around the new centricity F as the lower voice finishes a reflection of the Working Mother Motive. As previously discussed, Larsen combined the Stagecoach and Working Mother Motives in mm. 8-10 (Figure 20) and in the important divisional blur before the last section of this song on mm. 37-38 (Figure
Similarly, she places the Working Mother Motive in close proximity to the “damn their souls to hell” rhythmic version of the Tack Piano Motive. This reminds the listener of the resulting sacrifices Calamity made in her efforts to try and support herself and Janey financially.

The words Larsen groups together for use with the Tack Piano Motive is significant. “Russell’s saloon,” “run me out of town,” “when my back is turned,” and “damn their souls to hell” all have one thing in common. Each line reflects or provides a link to the animosity felt between the “virtuous” women and Calamity. Her job at Russell’s saloon serves as the reason for this hatred between the women. As a result, they talk about her when her back is turned and eventually run her out of town. Calamity remains bitter and wants to damn their souls to hell as a result.

V. “All I Have (1902)"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section A’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-33</td>
<td>mm. 34-48</td>
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Figure 30. Form of Song V “All I Have (1902)"

“All I Have (1902)” divides into two unequal sections, as did the first song.

While Song I began with unaccompanied recitative, Song V begins with the
accompaniment alone. In this final song, Larsen continues to employ stark contrasts. Sections of free and calm recitative give way to a contrasting mood of agitation. This first agitated section begins in m. 13 where Larsen indicates a faster tempo and the instruction to “push ahead” in the score. After “Calmly, sadly” instructions in m. 16, Larsen encourages the performers to “Push ahead” again in m. 22, and adds the indication “becoming more agitated”. This agitation and tension build until the climax follows in mm. 31-33, where a still faster tempo is reached.

With the exception of the third song, Larsen waits until four-fifths of the way through the previous songs to place the climax. She reiterates the same placement for the zenith of the overall piece. In Song V the climax (mm 31-33) appears earlier, near the middle of the song. As usual, the dénouement follows. What makes this conclusion significant is that it not only ends the song, but also the entire piece. Calamity asks for forgiveness as though she may actually regret a few actions in her life. Many moments in this piece expose Calamity’s vulnerable nature. However, the audience receives a final admission as she asks her daughter for forgiveness.

Five motives from Songs I and III return and are varied to create a major portion of the motives in the voice and accompaniment of Song V. These motives include the Wedge, Bell-Like, Picture, and Father Motives from the first song and the Calm Motive from the third song. Clearly, the return of these motives brings balance to the entire piece. Each motive is labeled in Figure 31 below.
Figure 31. Composite list of motives borrowed from Songs I and III for Song V

The tonal center of this song remains ambiguous until revealed in the end.

Because of the F held over from the *attaca* in Song IV, the tonal center seems at first to be F. A majority of the motives in this song originate from Song I, which has the tonal center F. However, the tonal function of these motives must be reinterpreted in the context of the final song. The centricity no longer clings to F, but appears to drift to G. Additionally, as the conclusion of a very tumultuous and dramatic piece, Larsen presents the second portion of this song as being more tonal than we have heard in the previous four songs. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, tonal centers exist throughout each song although Larsen does not use functional harmony. However, the end of Song V presents a significant altered chord above the leading tone which resolves in the bass (mm. 45-46). The chord structure previous to this last motion reflects movement which is comparable to functional tonality.

Rather than working from the beginning to establish the tonal center, I will work from the end. The final three measures present the Bell-Like Motive. The function of this motive in Song I was to project the F tonal center and the activity it encompassed. In
Song V the function of the Bell-Like Motive changes. The listener hears the F activity but focuses on a melodic resolution to G. The Bb implies a G minor mode and confirms the sadness of the conclusion. Still, the F in the motive remains and creates a seventh to the tonic. Prior to these last measures, Larsen presents the Bell-Like Motive with an altered chord above the leading tone (m. 45). The chord contains both A and A#, which deceives the ear and alters the first-inversion dominant chord. Just as Song I concludes with the voice ending on the lower neighbor to the F tonal center, Song V reveals an unresolved vocal line, which finishes on the upper neighbor to the G tonal center. This lack of resolution reflects Calamity’s regret and sorrow as she accepts her fate.

In mm. 43-44, the Ab major chord on the downbeat of both measures presents a Neapolitan chord in the G centricity. Here, Larsen writes a plagal progression in both mm. 43-44. Measure 42 presents another altered first-inversion dominant chord. While the A and A# in the voice leading create dissonance, the A helps the listener hear and better understand the progression. Additionally, the D in the accompaniment, which is only present for a thirty-second note in m. 45, aids the listener in hearing the dominant.

A reduction of the end of Song V (mm. 42-48) appears in Figure 32 below. It is important to note that the leading tone motion to the tonic (mm. 45-48) remains the strongest tonal ending Larsen provides her audience in the scena. Nevertheless, the extra notes in the altered dominant and the tonic destabilize the cadence to a small degree and create a sense of ambiguity in the end.

Prior to this ending, the Neapolitan chord moves to the IV7 on the Db major seventh numerous times (beginning on m. 37). Furthermore, Ab plays a major role on the downbeats of many measures, beginning on m. 16, to set up this G centricity. This plagal
motion from the Neapolitan Ab to Db recurs a number of times and deserves a name, so it will be labeled the Plagal Motive. The reduction of mm. 43-44 in Figure 32 illustrates this motion in the Plagal Motive.

Finally, at the beginning of the song during the culmination of the various motives from Songs I and III, mm. 5-7 appear to be out of place. However, the altered dominant at the conclusion (m. 42 and 45) aids in understanding these otherwise misplaced chords. These measures establish the ambiguous dominant, although the audience may be unaware of the tonal center that will be revealed.

Throughout the song Larsen combines motives to create new melodies. From the beginning, the audience hears quiet melodic references to the Father, the Bell-Like, and the Calm Motives in the accompaniment. A clever combination of both the Father
Motive and the Calm Motive occurs in mm. 3-4. Figure 34 illustrates both original motives and presents m. 3 wherein the Father Motive begins at pitch and is quickly replaced by the Calm Motive. The interview with Larsen reveals much about the Calm Motive in conjunction with its use in Song V. While the motive remains in the piano and is never used in conjunction with the word recollection, Larsen states that this motive represents recollection. Later in this song, the motive combines with “picture” in the lyrics to clearly indicate that Calamity is recalling. This combination will also be shown later in the paper. Larsen states, “We are to understand that in her day to have a picture meant months; in our day to have a picture means seconds, with digital camera.” Time becomes more vital now as Calamity realizes that she is quickly losing her sight as well as her time on this earth.

![Figure 34. Combination of Father and Calm Motives in Song V](image)

Other combinations of motives exist. Measures 9-10 combine the motion of the Calm Motive with the stationary perfect fifth from the Bell-Like Motive. Figure 35 only presents m. 10 with both original motives.

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68 Ibid., 200 in Appendix C.
69 Ibid.
Examples of text painting occur throughout Song V. As seen in Figures 35 and 36, Larsen retains the Bell-Like and Calm Motives in the accompaniment as Calamity begins to sing “All hope of seeing you again is dead, Janey.” “Seeing you” aptly presents the Father Motive, which implies the thematic connection established in Song I between Janey and her father as Calamity remembers him. Additionally, Calamity implies that she will never see Bill as well. It is important to note that this iteration of the Father Motive is the first within this song that includes the motive in its entirety, as the downbeat sounds on F. In m. 12, a rhythmic palindrome presents the end of a C triad that moves from major into a minor mode by flattening the E. Larsen appropriately places the unhappiness of the minor mode on “dead” in this phrase.
the original repeated C. More significantly, the use of this motive confirms my idea about Song I. Larsen hints that Calamity’s memory remains incomplete and biased. Larsen expresses this when Calamity compares the picture of Janey to her memory of Bill. Musically, the varying triplets in the Picture and Father Motives express this imperfection. In Song V, “blunder” and the intentional melodic imperfection, as compared to the original version, musically express human memories as being flawed. Both the original Picture Motive and the “blundered” motive appear in Figure 37.

![Figure 37](image)

Figure 37. Text painting with “blunder” in Song V

Encouraging a very dramatic performance, Larsen gives the instruction “with flexibility throughout,” which is noted with the tempo in the beginning of the song. The fermatas in the opening combine with the ever-fluctuating tempi to aid in a drama that the soprano can use to her full advantage. As the performers build toward the climax (mm. 31-33) of this song, Larsen shifts from using motives from Song I to only using transpositions of the Calm Motive from Song III. The shift occurs in m. 18 with a literal repetition of the Picture Motive as it moves into the Wedge Motive (a quotation of mm. 1-3 of Song I) and in m. 21 with a rhythmically altered iteration of the Father Motive. Calamity becomes more agitated from the mention of Janey’s father. Through tonal sequencing, Larsen builds tension as Calamity angrily repeats that she is going blind. Larsen presents contrast and irony in her use of the Calm (or recollection) Motive for this agitated section, which is far from calm. Figure 38 illustrates the beginning of this
section in which Larsen combines “pictures” with the Calm, or recollection, Motive rather than with the Picture Motive.

As a final point, Larsen mentions in her interview that she waits to resolve the Calm Motive until the end of the song when Calamity finally accepts that she will never see Janey again because of distance and impending blindness. Believing Calamity secretly yearns to be a mother figure to Janey, Larsen adds the following:

That’s why she was writing the letters, which Janey was never to read until after she was gone. And so when she says, ‘Good night little girl’, and the recollection [Calm] motive resolves, that really is to me the saddest moment of the entire scene, because she is resolved that she will never, will never see her daughter again, you know. Nor will she ever be able to be the mother that she wanted to be.  

The resolution of the Calm Motive occurs on m. 44 in conjunction with the Plagal Motive as shown in Figure 39 below.

Figure 38. Calm Motive representing recollection in Song V

Figure 39. Resolution of Calm Motive in Song V

70 Ibid., 200 in Appendix C.
*Songs from Letters* presents a dramatic and emotional portrayal of Calamity Jane from the legend’s own words as she wrote to her daughter Janey. Larsen’s setting creates an ecology for the delivery of Calamity’s words. This ecology transports the listener into a theater in his or her own mind and allows for a creative freedom in which the listener can fashion a visual extension of the music.

Using repetition of certain poetic themes and textual motives, Larsen creates a structure and balances musical motives to project form. By combining mood and tempo in alteration throughout the piece, both the audience and the performers experience a balance of conflict and calm, musical challenge and relative leisure. In Song IV, Larsen reminds the audience of the previous songs by recalling various motives and musical references. The alternation of tempo and mood not only includes the recurring premise of contrast, but also unites the piece as a whole. In the final song, Larsen again uses recurring musical motives in the overall structure but transforms and recombines them. Motives from Songs I and III create a formal rounding off. However, their tonal implications differ from their original appearance, so their functions in this last song must be redefined to fit their new ecological space.

Poetic themes also play an important role in balancing the overall form of the piece. In the first song Calamity reflects on the resemblance between the pictures of Janey and Calamity’s own memory of Bill. While this memory may be imperfect, it remains important for Calamity’s emotional survival. In the final song Calamity becomes agitated by her impending blindness. The largest cause for her distress is in accepting the she will no longer be able to rely on her pictures to remember Janey. As with Bill, Calamity will have to rely on her memory to see her daughter’s face again.
While this remains a temporary comfort, Larsen musically explains that memory fades. In the end, Calamity experiences a poignant moment which exposes the vulnerable side of her character.
Chapter 4. *Songs from Letters as an Orchestrated Scena*

Larsen composes *Songs from Letters* using Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter Janey. Through repetition of textual and musical motives, Larsen forms the structure of the piece by reshaping and balancing these recurring ideas. Contrast plays an important role as a recurring premise within the piece. Alternating mood and tempo throughout the five songs aids in this contrast and creates a delicate balance of proportion. Through her music, Larsen creates an ecology for the delivery of Calamity’s words. This ecology exists as a theater in the listener’s own mind and allows for a creative freedom which he or she can use as a visual extension of the music.

The orchestrated version of *Songs from Letters* originated from a recording project with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Benita Valente. Larsen originally composed *Songs of Light and Love* in 1998 for Valente, which was recorded by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. The two artists decided that *Songs from Letters* would work well as an orchestrated scena, so Larsen orchestrated the piece and included it on the recording.71 A few discrepancies between the original version and the orchestrated version occur. These changes were made at the request of Valente rather than as a timbral decision on the part of Larsen. Subsequent to the recording, the composer decided to keep these changes in the score.72

The orchestra consists of flute, clarinet, percussion battery, harp, piano, and strings. It is important to note that the orchestra contains only two wind instruments. By having only two woodwind colors available, Larsen creates a more noticeable focus

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71 Ibid., 196 in Appendix C.
72 Ibid., 197-8 in Appendix C.
toward the flute and clarinet when the instruments are utilized. This focus becomes important as the wind instruments depict the characters Calamity and Bill, respectively. For the most part, Larsen writes the clarinet in the beautiful *chalumeau* register. This low register relates well to the low speaking voice of a man. Larsen also employs the *clarino* register, mainly for the purposes of the Shooting Motive. Calamity already has a voice in the soprano as she verbally expresses the narrative. However, I believe a musical connection exists on the subconscious level between the flute and soprano as they share the expressive and dramatic nature of Calamity’s character. These points will be discussed later in this chapter.

Larsen states in her interview that she does not pre-compose. While she researches her text, considers the time period and location in which the text transpires, and reflects on the characters that are involved, she leaves the compositional process and techniques entirely in the service of her instincts. For this reason, I believe that Larsen’s characterization involving the flute and clarinet is purely subconscious.

This version of the *scena* serves as a timbral extension of the messages Calamity sends to Janey and enhances the narrative. Through Larsen’s use of percussion, string techniques, and characterization, this version of *Songs from Letters* develops and accentuates the lyricism of the soprano. Furthermore, the orchestra better enables Larsen to evoke emotional response because she has more techniques and colors at her disposal.

**Percussion and String Techniques in *Songs from Letters***

Larsen uses a number of orchestral techniques to enhance the beauty and sadness of Calamity’s words. The timbre and texture of the orchestra provide Larsen with more

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73 Ibid., 201 in Appendix C.
tools in which to supplement the piece. Such timbral effects include harmonics in the strings and harp, *sul ponticello* in the strings, and flutter tongue in the flute. Tremolos and trills affect the mood, bringing tension to central moments. Additionally the percussion battery is filled with pitched and unpitched instruments to aid in the effectiveness of the narrative. The percussion includes orchestra bells (or glockenspiel), marimba, temple blocks, tom-toms, woodblocks, suspended cymbal (used with various beaters and bowed), slapstick, and bowed flexitone.

**Song I. “So Like Your Father’s (1880)”**

One of the most delicate moments in terms of effects is heard immediately in the orchestration. In Song I after Calamity sings her opening recitative, the orchestra gently enters with the Wedge Motive (mm. 2-3). The harp and orchestra bells lend audible support to the delicate harmonics in the first and second violins, and the support continues with the addition of the flute on the third downbeat of m. 3. The harmonics in the violins give the motive a quiet and gentle mood until the clarinet and violas fill in the middle register upon completion of the motive. Figure 40 below shows the first (mm. 2-3) and second (mm. 8-9) occurrences of the Wedge Motive in Song I. The orchestra bells, harp, cellos, and contrabasses are similar in both settings. However, Larsen replaces the violins with viola harmonics and allows the flute to continue its doubling of the soprano. The viola harmonics present a subtle, but different timbre for the second Wedge Motive. The flute doubling will be discussed in the characterization section within this chapter.

The Bell-Like Motive (mm. 4-7 below) appears between the two occurrences of the Wedge Motive illustrated below. Larsen provides subtle timbral distinctions in this
Figure 40. Similar orchestration in the two versions of the Wedge Motive in Song I Bell-Like Motive passage. While the violins sustain the whole notes at a perfect fifth, the clarinet plays the active F-C-G figure. For aural support and color, the violas and cellos (circled in the Figure 41 below) alternate in playing only the F-G portion of the motive.
The harp provides a delicate effect with the harmonics in m. 4 and m. 6 and timbral diversity as it takes over the active figure in the Bell-Like Motive in m. 7.
Song I ends with a return of the Bell-Like Motive. To bring balance to the song, the active portion of the motive remains in the clarinet at the end. However, the piano now doubles the clarinet at the unison. This doubling provides a noticeable timbral difference, especially because the piano was unheard until this point in the song. The song ends with the lyrics “brought back all the years.” This line evokes a nostalgia for the past, and Calamity’s nostalgia is manifest in the piano as it joins the clarinet for this final section. Furthermore, the combination of the words in the text and the presence of the entire Bell-Like Motive in the piano may refer to Larsen bringing back the piano and the original version of the *scena*. Larsen can only achieve a color such as this with an orchestra. Additionally, the harp harmonics coincide with the strings’ score marking “in the distance” as Calamity trails off in the end.

At first hearing, the G in the orchestra is prominent despite the F tonal center established in the song. The G prominence occurs because Larsen adds texture and introduces G octaves in new registers. The new registers occur on the fourth downbeat of m. 16. These new attacks (circled in Figure 42) differ from the original version where no new octaves or reiterations of G occurred. The G in the basses provides a very noticeable texture and final difference from the original version because the contrabass sounds an octave lower.

The F tonal center suggested by the Bell-Like Motive and soprano lines in mm. 4-5 becomes more ambiguous because of the prominence of G at the end of the song. The prominent G pairs with the incomplete sentiment left by the soprano on “brought back all the years.” The unresolved E in the soprano combines with the G in the orchestra to give the audience a greater sense of Calamity’s longing. Because of Larsen’s
orchestration, the lacking resolution to Song I becomes more noticeable to the listener. As the tonal center in Song II is E, the lack of closure heard in Song I might further reflect the lack of closure felt by Calamity regarding Bill. Figure 42 below shows the new reiterations of G and the incomplete resolution in Song I.

![Figure 42. Incomplete resolution in Song I](image)

**Song II. “He Never Misses (1880)”**

Song II introduces a more energetic form of the drama Larsen creates. Rather than reflecting on pictures, Calamity is actively involved with a shootout. Larsen’s
orchestration evokes tension from the outset of the song with tremolos in the violins and marimba. The tremolo and resulting momentum provides color and tension that Larsen cannot achieve from the piano alone. The additional texture supports the F-C perfect fifth, which sounds an octave higher than heard in the ostinato. The marimba combines with the piano to play the opening ostinato. It is important to note that in the marimba part, Larsen cleverly writes the eighth notes without a tremolo which may facilitate the performer in this fast tempo. In m. 2 the violas also contain tremolo activity. However, the violas function as support for the soprano with their doubling an octave lower.

Other changes from the original version of the ostinato occur. The orchestra combines to sustain the E from the ostinato. The cellos in m. 1 sustain the E at pitch, and then pass the pitch to the clarinet in m. 2. Next, the basses sustain the E an octave lower in m. 3. This additional texture also supplies the audience with a difference in color. Pizzicato Es on the downbeats of mm. 1 and 2 also add color and provide a different setting of the original ostinato. Figure 43 presents the ostinato from the original version of the scena for comparison. Figure 44 illustrates the differences, including the tremolos, in the orchestrated version of the opening ostinato.

![Figure 43. Original version of opening ostinato in Song II](image_url)
Figure 44. Orchestrated version of opening ostinato in Song II

Viola tremolos (from m. 2) recur later in Song II. This precedent becomes important in mm. 8-9 when the violas and cellos take over the marimba’s role in the ostinato as the percussion player temporarily moves to temple blocks. The intermittent
return of the tremolo color proves important because it results in prolonged tension and momentum throughout the song. The temple blocks occur after a measure full of Shooting Motives and provide an additional depiction of the gunfire. Rather than leave this entire two-measure passage to just one instrument, Larsen divides the part between the two instruments to create a slight difference in timbre. Additionally, placing the cellos’ measure an octave lower than the original ostinato aids in creating a different timbral color.

It is important to note that the tremolos return in the violins during this section (beginning on m. 9) playing *sul ponticello*. The violins again provide a new attack unheard in the original *scena* and play the F-C perfect fifth an octave above the original ostinato. Not only do the tremolos bring back tension, the *sul ponticello* color exposes a metallic sound which also aids in increasing the rigidity that Larsen conveys. Furthermore, the new flute and clarinet attacks (F-C) on the downbeat of mm. 8 and 9 provide additional color. Figure 45 below shows these varying colors and new attacks.

In the second section of Song II, the ostinato returns and the marimba joins the piano for the entire ostinato figure. Rather than using medium yarn mallets, the marimba uses hard mallets, thus creating a different color for this varied return. The cellos and basses provide bass support as well as color on the F# (which is the new tonal center for this section) on the downbeat of m. 24, as circled in Figure 46 below. Additionally, the F#-G# *pizzicato* in the violas echo the vocal part and provide an example of text painting. Calamity sings “I’ll never forget…” as the violas continue to function as a part of her memory. Her reverie resumes in the voice in the following measure.
Figure 45. Varying colors and new attacks in Song II
Figure 46. Percussion color and new texture in Song II

The marimba continues with the ostinato in this section until m. 27. Next, Larsen employs the suspended cymbal to combine with the Shootout Motive in m. 28. The single attack on the downbeat of m. 28 functions as another depiction of the gunfire used
throughout Song II. Additionally, Larsen’s use of sticks on the suspended cymbal for the roll on beats 3-4 in m. 28 creates a more separated and tinny roll than when using a softer mallet. This color coincides with the tack piano sound that Larsen describes in the interview. She associates this sound with one that resembles a more makeshift, substitute form of presenting music, which could be found in the Old West on ramshackle theater stages and in bars.\textsuperscript{74} Figure 46 illustrates contrasting percussive parts in m. 24 and m. 28 and shows new attacks as well as bass support on F#.

Finally, the flute provides another difference between the orchestrated version and the original version. Larsen adds color by including flutter tongue in the flute on two notes from the Shootout Motive. This flute technique echoes the strings’ tremolo and the resulting tension. Additionally, the flute ends the measure with a staccato A to C. Rather than write the C in the same octave as it appears in the Shootout Motive in the piano, Larsen places the C up an octave and creates a wedge shape which opposes the direction she has been using until this point.

Larsen utilizes more percussive instruments in Song II than in any of the other songs. In m. 21 before the first occurrence of “Bill killed them all,” Larsen writes two short eighth notes for large woodblock. These \textit{forte} attacks resemble a gunshot more than in any of the Shooting Motives previously heard. Appropriately, this effect occurs before Calamity’s hero Bill kills the outlaws. Additionally, Larsen diminishes the texture for this measure so the “shots” can ring out above the remaining accompaniment.

The most noticeable percussive effect in the song, however, occurs after the second “Bill kills them all” (during the Shootout Motive in m. 40) and during the final shootout section in mm. 44-45. On the first beat of m. 40 and m. 44 Larsen uses a \textit{forte}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 198 in Appendix C.
slapstick to accentuate the beginning of these shootouts. M. 28 and m. 40 greatly resemble each other with the only major difference occurring in Larsen’s use of slapstick rather than suspended cymbal as the percussive extension of the gunfire. Figure 47 below illustrates the use of slapstick on m. 44 during the final shootout section. *Pizzicato* strings and *staccato* flute and clarinet aid in the percussive effect Larsen creates for the activity in the shootout.

The wedge shape that occurs in the flute in m. 28 recurs in mm. 44-45. The flute and clarinet combine with the violins to create texture and color which enhance the final shootout section. The clarinet and second violins play the piano part while the first violins play the inversion. The flute begins to play the inversion, but ends on the F on the downbeat an octave higher. The flute/clarinet wedge and the first/second violins wedge are circled in Figure 47.

To contrast the percussive shootout and to create balance, Larsen ends Song II with a varied return of the opening ostinato. The *pizzicato* notes and *fortissimo* piano in the final shootout section yield to sustained *arco* notes in the strings and *piano* dynamics in the end. As Larsen adds texture and color to the opening ostinato in the orchestrated version, she also adds texture and color to the ostinato in the closing measures of the song. This texture differs from that which she presents in the beginning of Song II (in Figure 44). The ostinato remains in the marimba and piano.

The harp provides doubling support to the jaunty figure in the left hand of the piano by playing the same rhythm up a major sixth and an octave and a major sixth. Rather than supplying tension with tremolos in the violins, the violins combine with the clarinet an octave lower on a sustained E in m. 46. Just as the E was passed in the
Figure 47. The final shootout section in Song II
beginning ostinato from the cellos, through the clarinet, and to the basses, the sustained E passes to the violas, cellos, and the flute in m. 47. The basses again provide support throughout the three-measure postlude by playing pizzicato Es which drop an octave each time, thus creating another wedge shape. Similar to the wedge shape found in the flute in
m. 28 and the flute, clarinet, and violins in mm. 44-45, this wedge expands rather than contracts. The closing wedge shape appears in the songs with the Wedge Motive (Songs I, IV, and V) and in Song III with the Fierce Motive falling into the chromatic cluster. Figure 48 illustrates the ostinato in the postlude of Song II.

**Song III. “A Man Can Love Two Women (1880)”**

Song III illustrates a greater example of contrast because of the differences in texture and dynamics for the Calm Motive and the Fierce Motive. The first noticeable example of contrast occurs on m. 3 in the Fierce Motive. Larsen anticipates the short-long rhythm in the piano with the strings, which differs from the original version, and writes a *forte* up-bow for the strings followed by a *piano* down-bow. The piano retains the music from the original version but is further accented by snap *pizzicato* in the contrabasses. Additionally, *forte* hits on the short-long rhythm in the tom-tom followed by a *piano* roll further accentuate the contrast within the Fierce Motive itself. The combination of these startling accents and effects stand out against the Calm Motive as it is heard in mm. 1-2. Figure 49 illustrates the Fierce Motive in m. 3.

Larsen maintains the strings’ anticipation of the short-long rhythm in the shortened version of the Fierce Motive in m. 7 and m. 14. This addition also differs from the original version. For the anticipation, only the violins play the short-long figure. Subsequently, Larsen presents a recomposed m. 8. She again anticipates the short-long figure on the downbeat in the violins, which then echoes in the violas and cellos. Figure 49 includes mm. 7-8 so that the differences in the original Fierce Motive, the shortened version, and the echoed anticipated figure can be compared.
The differences between the soprano melody in mm. 7-8 in the original version and the orchestrated version must be addressed. Larsen states in the interview that the changes in the vocal score were made at the request of the soprano performer Benita Valente. Subsequently, Larsen decided to maintain these changes in order for the
publication of the score to match the recording. Therefore, no changes in the soprano were based on timbral choices.\textsuperscript{75} Whereas some differences between the two versions of \textit{Song from Letters} are notable, this particular passage is inconsequential.

Another version of the Fierce Motive appears in the second section of Song III. This expanded Fierce Motive also carries the wedge shape and points toward the Eb-D axis of symmetry. Larsen orchestrates each occurrence of this motive similarly. Therefore, Figure 50 illustrates only the orchestration in mm. 15-16. The piano retains the music from the original version. However, Larsen uses the orchestration to accentuate certain important notes and to create tension. The flute, clarinet, and harp accentuate the F and B heard on the downbeat of m. 15. Flutter tongue in the flute provides a new color. The tremolo in the violins, violas, and cellos provide tension for the drama and harkens back to Song II. Additionally, the orchestra bells (sounding two octaves above the piano and strings) cut through the piano and the \textit{pianissimo} strings to resonate beautifully above the tension and accentuate the Eb-D axis of symmetry.

As illustrated in Figure 50 below, Larsen provides the soprano with a new melody. Previously, the soprano sang the two-measure passage shown below in Figure 51. Comparing the two soprano melodies, the orchestrated version begins as the original does. However, Larsen repeats the C# for the first half of m. 16, so the octave leap is avoided. The vocal line in the orchestrated version better accentuates the C#-E boundary of the chromatic cluster which Larsen establishes in the previous measure.

As discussed earlier, Larsen contrasts the Fierce Motive and the Calm Motive. For the most part, Larsen orchestrates the Calm Motive in a straightforward manner to juxtapose the more complex colors of the Fierce Motive. She uses the strings and flute

\textsuperscript{75} Ibib., 197-8 in Appendix C.
Figure 50. Fierce Motive with wedge shape in Song III

Figure 51. Soprano melody in Song III from original version of *scena*

for this motive, occasionally adding the clarinet or harp harmonics. Toward the end of the song in mm. 36-37, Larsen includes the orchestra bells in octaves (Figure 52) to add a different timbral color to this motive. Previously heard *forte* in the Fierce Motive with
the wedge-like shape, Larsen brings back the orchestra bells to remind the audience of the previous motive. This softer sound assures the listener that the fury that Calamity once felt has now been resolved to a calmer demeanor.

Figure 52. Calm Motive and conclusion of Song III
An additional timbral color that Larsen exposes in the end of Song III is the chalumeau register of the clarinet. She combines the clarinet with the basses two octaves lower to create a beautifully dark and distinctive sound, as shown above in Figure 52. The rich color provides the audience with a memorable moment and balances the conclusions of Songs I and III. Larsen uses this same chalumeau register in the clarinet for the active portion of the Bell-Like Motive in Song I. In this conclusion, the lower strings only sustain Gs in low octaves. However, the two endings are similar in tone and mood.

**Song IV. “A Working Woman (1882-1893)”**

Like Song I, Song IV begins with a free recitative until the Wedge Motive unfolds in the orchestral accompaniment. Figure 53 below illustrates three instances of the Wedge Motive (two in Song I and one in Song IV) for comparison and contrast. In the violas, the score and recording contradict. Figure 53 below reflects the recording.

The orchestra bells and first violins playing harmonics begin the motive similar to that heard in mm. 2-3 in Song I. However, Larsen leaves the harp silent and introduces the middle register of the orchestra via the clarinet and violas. The thicker texture and dynamics in the first violins create a slightly louder presentation of the Wedge Motive. Additionally, the motive differs from that in Song I because Larsen exposes the middle register early in this occurrence. Despite these distinctions, the new version of the motive will surely remind the audience of the motive in Song I.

In the first section of Song IV, Larsen writes tremolos in the strings to accompany the text “all the virtuous women planned.” This text precedes “run me out of town” and the Tack Piano Motive. As previously heard in Songs II and III, the tremolos create
Figure 53. Wedge Motive mm. 2-3 and mm. 8-9 in Song I and mm. 2-4 in Song IV
tension and momentum which are necessary as Larsen builds toward “run me out of town.” However, as shown in Figure 54, Larsen writes this subsequent text and the Tack Piano Motive in a percussive fashion using light *staccato* notes in the strings and large woodblock in the percussion. Larsen builds the tension, but releases on a lesser climax.
than the audience expects, thus creating anticipation for a larger climax toward the end of the song.

To accompany Calamity’s job with Bill Cody’s Wild West Show in Section B, the Shooting Motive returns in the flute and clarinet. Additionally, Larsen composes woodblock hits to aid the audience in imagining the horse that Calamity will be riding bareback for the show. Figure 55 below shows an example of the Shooting Motive in the second section of Song IV. In this example, the flute trills in m. 25 provide color in the motive that would be difficult to obtain in the original version. More importantly, the flute trills echo the string tremolo and flute flutter tongue in Song II and create balance throughout the entire scena.

As the clarinet and strings play the original motive, the flute and harp double an octave higher adding support and color to the original register. Another change from the original setting occurs in the vocal line. In m. 27 the soprano sings F which is a diminished seventh higher than the G# in the original version of the scena. This G# reflects the double-dotted Ab from the Shooting Motive in the following beat rather than the double-dotted F in the previous beat. The change provides text painting and keeps the soprano within a tritone rather than extending the range to a diminished seventh.

A second percussive effect occurs in mm. 42-43. Larsen directs the percussionist to bow a suspended cymbal. The arrows indicate the direction of the bow stroke. Figure 56 below illustrates the passage. This excerpt occurs after Calamity’s description of her future job with Bill Cody’s Wild West Show as she returns to the present description where she now works for a living. Larsen disguises the first part of the Working Mother Motive and blurs the boundary between the second and third sections of the song. The
motive, which is up a whole step from the original setting, appears in the piano and violins. Also, it spans three octaves rather than two because the piano plays an octave higher than in the original version. Harmonics in the first violins aid in the dream-like feel which Larsen establishes for the blurred sectional boundaries and the subsequent recitative.

Figure 55. Woodblock percussion with the Shooting Motive in Song IV
Figure 56. Bowed suspended cymbal in Song IV

The tension and the text “virtuous women” from Section A returns in Section A’. Throughout this section, Larsen builds the tension via *sul ponticello* trills in the lower strings and tremolos in the violins. She alternates between peaks in tension by pairing the *sul ponticello* trills with harmonics in the first violins for additional color. Larsen occasionally uses flutter tongue in the flute to accompany the tremolo peaks in tension or lessens the tension as the lower strings play *arco*. These alternating peaks in tension
finally build to the climax of the entire piece (mm. 61-63). Figure 57 illustrates the development toward this climax. Larsen replaces *sul ponticello* trills with tremolos in the violins and violas. To aid the strings in creating tension, she uses rolls on the tom-toms and suspended cymbal.

![Figure 57. Climax of the piece in Song IV](image)

As in Song II, Larsen ends Song IV with a contrasting section. This new section represents repose following the climax where contrast is expected. The calm dénouement
that follows the turmoil of the climax displays a quiet quote of the Working Mother Motive.

The light Tack Piano Motive quote in the piano might seem strangely out of place after the emotion and rage of the climax. However, the upbeat motive reflects Calamity’s desire to move on while also serving as a reminder of her lingering emotions as evident from the *sul ponticello* tremolo in the violas. Figure 58 above presents the final measures of Song IV.

Figure 58. Final measures of Song IV

The light Tack Piano Motive quote in the piano might seem strangely out of place after the emotion and rage of the climax. However, the upbeat motive reflects Calamity’s desire to move on while also serving as a reminder of her lingering emotions as evident from the *sul ponticello* tremolo in the violas. Figure 58 above presents the final measures of Song IV.
Song V. “All I Have (1902)”

In Song II, Larsen set a precedent of creating musical special effects with percussion instruments to emphasize certain moments. The most memorable effect occurs in the slapstick at the beginning of the final shootout section. In Song V, Larsen utilizes a bowed flexitone to create a more melancholy effect. One beat before Calamity sings the first line of the song, “I am going blind,” a bowed flexitone plays an ascending glissando (m. 9). Heard against the quiet orchestral accompaniment, the effect creates a soft, tinny cry. In one respect, the sound falls within the ecology Larsen creates with the Tack Piano Motive and the tinny suspended cymbal, which she describes as a ramshackle attempt by settlers to create music in the Old West. More importantly, the eerie cry that the flexitone creates sounds as though it could be a desperate cry from Calamity herself. Her angst and frustration consume her, so she produces a soft cry in desperation.

As discussed in the second chapter, many motives from the previous songs return in Song V. The Wedge Motive, originally from Song I and brought back in Song IV, reappears in mm. 18-19. Its appearance in Song V begins like the Wedge Motive in Song IV because Larsen uses the exact same instrumentation, including the memorable harmonics in the first violins. An exception is the use of the harp which she employed in both iterations of the motive during Song I but not in Song IV. Additionally, the last interval of the motive (Eb-A in the violas and second violins respectively) appears an octave higher than previously heard. Octaves in the harp make this transition seamless. Figure 59 below illustrates the Wedge Motive as it appears in Song V.77

76 Ibid., 198 in Appendix C.
77 For comparison, Figure 53 shows the Wedge Motive from Song IV and both iterations of the motive from Song I.
In Song V, the Bell-Like Motive first appears in m. 2. Larsen alternates a statement of the motive with statements of the Father Motive and the Calm Motive in the beginning of the song. Later, she expands the Bell-Like Motive in mm. 34-36. In these measures, Larsen places a statement of the active portion of the motive in the clarinet, followed by the harp, and lastly in the flute. This instrumental order mirrors the order
that appears in the second half of Song I. Like many of the motivic echoes, Larsen presents a slightly different iteration to present a slightly different color. For example, in Song I the first violin doubles the harp at the octave, and the piano doubles the flute at the octave. Rather than presenting this order with other instrumental colors, the instruments are now by themselves. Figure 60 illustrates the Bell-Like Motives below.

Figure 60. Bell-Like Motives in Song V
The conclusion of Song V finds the active portion of the Bell-Like Motive in the chalumeau register of the clarinet. Songs I and V resemble each other in this respect. It is also important to remember that Song III ends with the use of this low clarinet register although it is with a different motivic fragment. The importance of this register is discussed later in the paper in the characterization section.

The return of this motive brings balance to the overall form of the piece. Figure 61 below illustrates how Larsen finishes the piece in a straightforward manner. As the orchestra quietly plays its sustained harmony, viola trills and piano grace notes interject with the activity of the Bell-Like Motive.

Changes such as subtle octave doublings occur in various voices to alter the sound of the scena’s conclusion. The harp doubles the F first-violin harmonics an octave higher. Additionally, the flute doubles the clarinet G an octave higher, and the viola trills between G and A at pitch. More importantly, Larsen changes the sound of the conclusion by introducing A as a new note. The piano plays the A in octaves after G grace notes, and the higher register in which the As appear sounds noticeably against the orchestra. This new pitch makes the final tonal center of the piece more ambiguous than in the original version. Low F pizzicato notes in the bass combine with the piano As to suggest an F tonal center. However, the possibility that Larsen provides no resolution, as in the end of Song I, transfers to the end of the scena.

Larsen writes the orchestra piano and includes the indication morendo rather than decrescendo. The Italian term morendo, which means “dying or fading away,” accurately describes the musical action as well as Calamity’s health and mental state. Perhaps the ambiguous resolution and the morendo conclusion combine to leave the
audience with a feeling of unresolved closure. This lack of resolution may reflect the question of what will happen when Janey discovers her true identity after receiving and reading the letters from her mother. Although the story ends for Calamity, it continues throughout Janey’s life.

Figure 61. Conclusion of Song V
Characterization in *Songs from Letters*

Often composers use the assignment of a certain melody or instrument to represent a person or idea within the music. Hector Berlioz’s *idée fixe* and Richard Wagner’s *leitmotifs* are examples of motives that create recollection and psychological associations dealing with programmatic references, characters, or suggestions. In the analysis of this piece, examples of *leitmotifs* are present, such as the Calm Motive’s representing “recollection” in Song V. Larsen differs from Wagner in that she approaches the use of *leitmotifs* in a timbral sense. She uses instrumental color rather than melodic or thematic repetition as the basis of the programmatic reference and essentially adds another layer of representation.

For example, Larsen uses the chalumeau register of the clarinet as a representation of Bill Hickok. The richness of this register expresses his dark and menacing nature and accentuates the unfolding drama in the *scena*. Likewise, Larsen appropriately uses the feminine register of the flute as Calamity Jane. Although Calamity also has her voice in the soprano, a musical connection exists on the subconscious level between the flute and soprano as they share the expressive and dramatic nature of Calamity’s character. This is clearest when the flute doubles the soprano at important moments throughout the orchestrated score.

**Flute Representation of Calamity Jane**

In Song I mm. 6-7 Larsen doubles the flute and soprano on the text “brought back all the years.” In Song II the flute joins the soprano twice on the end of the phrase “I crawled through the brush to warn him” (mm. 11-13 and mm. 15-17). Doubled at the octave on “to warn him,” Larsen alters the phrase to add a rhythmic lower neighbor note
the first time and to revisit the previous harmony using the same rhythmic notation.

Figure 62 below illustrates both examples of the doublings. (For the remainder of the paper, only the pertinent instrumentation will be shown in the figures.) These excerpts comprise the most solid and direct connection that the flute and soprano form together.

![Figure 62. Doublings between soprano and flute in Songs I and II](image)

Unlike Songs I and II, the flute does not double the soprano in Song III. However, the flute represents Calamity by maintaining the eighth-note figure in the Calm Motive. Larsen states in the interview that this motive illustrates Calamity’s recollection. As the flute represents a secondary or extended musical embodiment of Calamity, the flute’s participation in the recollection or Calm Motive signifies Calamity’s subconscious and nostalgia. In this way, the flute personifies Calamity Jane.

Song IV contains no direct example of the flute doubling the voice. The most significant passage that links the soprano and flute to form Calamity’s character in Song IV appears below in Figure 63. In the original version of *Songs from Letters*, the first

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78 Larsen, Interview by the Author, 200 in Appendix C.
section of the song ends with a quote of the Working Mother Motive in the accompaniment, which is soon joined by the soprano. In the orchestrated version, Larsen chooses the flute and the cello three octaves below to accompany the soprano with the Working Mother Motive. The flute illustrates musically the connection of characterization between these instruments, and the cello adds a luscious color to give the passage more body. In this song, the flute’s anticipation of the soprano line maintains the representation.

![Figure 63. Soprano and flute characterization in Song IV](image)

In Song V, a transformation takes places that is manifest within a different instrumental representation. Here, the violin takes over the active eighth note in the Calm (or recollection) Motive. The flute represents the subconscious ideas of Calamity. Through this song, Calamity becomes more aware of her thoughts. Indeed she finally admits that she is going blind (mm. 31-33). As she faces her mortality, she also admits that she will never get a chance to be the mother she longed to be. Until this point,
Calamity only felt this desire subconsciously. The flute’s inactivity with the soprano confirms that a transformation has occurred in Calamity. Figure 64 presents Calamity’s final realization as she accepts her blindness. It is important to note that the first violins, not the flute, double the soprano at pitch and an octave higher.

Figure 64. No flute characterization in Song V
Clarinet Representation of Wild Bill Hickok

The clarinet represents Bill throughout the orchestrated version of Songs from Letters. Numerous examples of the clarinet characterization exist throughout the scena. One such instance is found in the Bell-Like Motive in Song I. As the violins maintain the whole notes at a perfect fifth, the clarinet plays the active F-C-G figure. For aural support and color, the viola and cello alternate in playing only the F-G portion of the motive. This passage first appears in Figure 41. Figure 65 reproduces the excerpt below. The Bell-Like Motive occurs in the clarinet and the violins as Calamity sings of Janey’s expression and declares that her appearance is like her father’s. This connection between the clarinet and Calamity’s mention of Janey’s father provides the characterization. As the soprano continues to sing “brought back all the years,” the flute doubles the soprano and the harp takes over the active motion of the Bell-Like Motive for the clarinet. Voicing the continuation of this motive in the harp is understandable as Calamity no longer dwells on Bill and continues with her narrative. Additionally, the difference in color and texture is dramatic as the harp plays the figure in octaves.

The second half of Song I proceeds much like the first with the clarinet playing the active motion in the Bell-Like Motive. After singing “Janey, a picture of you…” with the clarinet, the soprano trails off, and the harp resumes the active portion of the motive. The first violin doubles with the harp at the octave, creating three octaves of the active portion of the Bell-Like Motive. As previously stated, Larsen balances the section and the song by placing the active portion of the motive in the clarinet with the score instruction “in the distance” at the song’s conclusion. Although Calamity tries to move on, Bill lingers in her mind.
Figure 65. Clarinet characterization in Song I

In Song II, both the flute and clarinet combine to play the Shooting Motives. The instruments unite to play the shootout between the legendary couple and two outlaws. To compare resembling characterization, Figure 66 shows a one-measure example of the
Shooting Motive from Song II and a two-measure example from Song IV. In Song IV, Larsen harkens back to the long-standing connection between the legends when both instruments participate in the Shooting Motive, although Bill has long-since been dead. As Bill, the clarinet reminds the audience of the correlation between the legendary couple, despite their years of being apart and his absence in the song. In terms of form, including the clarinet in this portion of the orchestration brings balance to the piece.

![Figure 66. Flute and clarinet characterization of the Shooting Motives in Songs II and IV](image)

Another example of characterization is shared in Song II between the flute and clarinet when Calamity sings, “I crawled through the brush to warn him.” This moment was previously discussed in reference to the flute doubling the soprano and illustrated in Figure 62. However, warbling trills (Figure 67) in the clarinet combine with Calamity’s flute characterization and correspond to the tension that must have been felt that day. As Bill and Calamity are in the gunfight with the outlaws, this additional characterization between the flute and clarinet is understandable.

In the second half of Song II, the flute and clarinet combine to make up the bass line in the first “I crawled through the brush” repeat (mm. 30-31). However, the violas and cellos combine to play the second occurrence of the bass line, giving the flute and the
clarinet a break. The transition between the characterization in Figure 62 above and the subsequent inactivity of the flute and clarinet, as the violas and cellos play the bass line, leads me to regard mm. 30-31 as a timbral voicing rather than an example of explicit characterization.

The clarinet and flute combine for a third example of characterization in Song II as Calamity sings “blood running down his face” in mm. 25-26. Larsen also uses text painting in the flute for this passage. The clarinet sustains whole notes, as the flute signifies the falling blood. The falling figure might seem to belong in the clarinet because Bill has the injury. However, Calamity seems more concerned about the blood than Bill, who continued to fight “while he used two guns.” As the sustained whole notes prior to the Shooting Motive suggest in Figure 68, Bill remains stoic and unrelenting despite his wound.

In Song III Bill functions as a point of reference within Calamity’s instruction to Janey. Calamity wants Janey to avoid making the same mistakes with respect to love and jealousy. In the second section the soprano sings “It drove your father from me” and repeats “I lost ev’rything I loved.” The clarinet pairs with the flute to create a harmonic

Figure 67. Flute doubling and clarinet tension in Song II
Figure 68. Flute text painting and clarinet characterization in Song II accompaniment. The appearance of the two instruments in opposite registral extremes represents how Calamity and Bill did not see eye to eye. Furthermore, the flutter tongue in the flute echoes the strings’ tremolo in the previous song and reminds the audience of the resulting tension as Calamity becomes more furious. Figure 69 below illustrates the characterization.

Figure 69. Flute and clarinet characterization in Song III

The only significant melodic line in the clarinet in Song III functions more for the purpose of color rather than characterization. The clarinet and contrabasses two octaves lower share the slight echo of the final line “because of you, Janey” in the accompaniment. I believe this voicing serves as a timbral decision within the
orchestration rather than as a reference to Bill. Regardless, Bill maintains a constant presence throughout Songs I, III, and V. This presence manifests itself through Larsen’s use of the chalumeau register in the clarinet, which she employs to end all three songs.

Song IV also contains examples of characterization between Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok. In the second section of the song, Larsen expands the Tack Piano Motive by augmenting the rhythm and transposing the motive. The flute and clarinet echo the Tack Piano Motive in m. 36. This example (shown in Figure 70) occurs as Calamity describes to Janey what her portion of the show will entail when she joins Bill Cody’s Wild West Show. First, she will ride her horse bareback. Then she will stand up, throw her Stetson hat in the air, and shoot it twice. Lastly, she will catch the hat on her head. Calamity seems to boast about this new job that she will have in the near future. Certainly, she earns this new job in entertainment from her reputation as an excellent sharpshooter and horsewoman. Calamity writes with pride to Janey about her new occupation. The prospect of traveling affords Calamity the luxury of leaving town and the “virtuous women” with her pride intact.

Calamity can easily accomplish the list of tasks she will have to perform in the show. Likewise, Bill could have accomplished the same feats as characterized by the clarinet. Perhaps Calamity uses this moment to reminisce on the antics the two performed when they rode together years ago. The Working Mother and the Stagecoach Motives directly follow this illustration of characterization. The proximity of these motives and the characterization provide a melancholy end to the section as Calamity abandons her musings of Bill and of the future job to return to the present.
Figure 70. Flute and clarinet characterization for the Tack Piano Motive in Song IV

Another example of the flute and clarinet characterization lies in the denial Calamity projects in mm. 46-47. She refers to the seemingly virtuous women who have bastards and shotgun weddings. Rather than have the flute double the soprano on “bastards and shotgun weddings,” the flute plays a compressed version of the first part of the soprano phrase as the clarinet doubles the middle of the phrase down an octave. It is important to remember that in the letter to Janey dated July 25, 1893, Calamity reveals,
“Your father James Butler Hickok left me after you were borne and to spite him I let the O’Neil’s adopt you. He was afraid of that common law wife of his and left me alone and sick.”\textsuperscript{79} The unofficial marriage license to which Calamity refers in the letters gives Calamity a sense of relief that she did not give birth out of wedlock. However, the feeling remains false as Calamity is in denial. Calamity did not obtain a more official marriage certificate, and Bill eventually abandoned Calamity and Janey. Calamity subconsciously reflects that she perceives herself as a virtuous woman via the compression of that portion of the vocal line in flute. She does this to save face. However, her self-projection proves false as the clarinet (Bill) combines with the flute (Calamity) to share the word “bastards.” Figure 71 below illustrates the soprano and flute with the clarinet doubling.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{flute_compression.png}
\caption{Flute compression and clarinet doubling in Song IV}
\end{figure}

Lastly, the flute and clarinet combine to present a statement of the Working Mother Motive and the Tack Piano Motive in mm. 64-65 (Figure 72) directly after the climax of the piece. Larsen presents the Working Mother Motive then augments the rhythm of the Tack Piano Motive, creating a calm, even-tempered conclusion before the

\textsuperscript{79} Hickok, \textit{Calamity Jane’s letters to her daughter}. 
soprano sings the Working Mother Motive for the last time. This quarter-note form of the Tack Piano Motive was only used in the soprano for the climax on the words “damn their souls to hell.” The direct correlation of the Working Mother Motive and the subsequent reaction “damn their souls to hell” adequately summarize the entire message of the fourth song.

Figure 72. Flute and clarinet characterization at the end of Song IV

Similar to the third song, Song V maintains the dialog between mother and daughter as Calamity finds the final words to serve as an appropriate closure in her life. Calamity sings in mm. 13-15, “What have I ever done except one blunder after another?” Following “blunder,” Larsen intentionally uses the incorrect repeated notes on the triplet “after.” Rather than sing D-C-C as it appears in the Picture Motive in Song I, the soprano sings D-D-C (Figure 37). In previous discussions of the analysis of Song V, this blunder refers to the imperfect memory we all possess as our years advance in number. It is possible that Calamity’s memory of Bill remains incomplete and her perception of the likeness between Bill and Janey’s picture is faulty. To reflect further this idea, the clarinet appears, doubled with the second violins and the violas at the unison for additional color. This blunder and its association with Bill appear clearly in Figure 73.
As previously discussed, the clarinet returns to combine with the flute in the Wedge Motive as Calamity sings of her pictures in mm. 18-19. This characterization reflects the connection between Janey’s picture and her resemblance to Bill as the soprano sings the Picture Motive. Below, Figure 74 shows the flute and clarinet characterization. Figure 59 illustrates the entire orchestration.
The active motion in the Bell-Like Motive returns in the clarinet toward the end of the piece. The purpose of its return is twofold. The motive and its appearance in the clarinet frames the piece giving balance to the scena. Additionally, the characterization of Bill through the clarinet reminds listeners that Bill remains in Calamity’s heart and will until the day she dies. Furthermore, he lives on through Janey and the letters Calamity left for her.

Through orchestration, Larsen enhances the narrative and further supports the form at work in the scena. Additionally, she creates a new subconscious level of meaning for the songs and adds a subtext of meaning to Calamity’s letters to Janey. Larsen evokes serenity, tension, and yearning through her use of instrument choices. Her percussion battery allows for numerous extensions of Calamity Jane’s emotions. The slapstick in the final shootout section in Song II and the bowed flexitone near the beginning of Song V provide the audience with a greater number of sounds to transport them to the ecological space Larsen hopes her listeners will create in their minds. The orchestrated version provides the audience with more color and texture than the original version of the scena and allows for Larsen to add a more complex use of the subtext and subconscious within the songs.

This study of Songs from Letters reveals a number of considerations and techniques regarding composition and orchestration which Larsen employs. She considers the time period, text, and ecology of her subject Calamity Jane so that she can musically recreate these elements. Larsen does this in order to present her listeners with an opportunity to use their imagination in creating their own ecology in a theater in their mind. This process heightens the listening experience and achieves a more visual
performance for the listener. Also, Larsen combines and reuses textual and musical motives throughout the piece. While this is a common compositional technique, the cyclical presentation in which she reuses the motives affords an opportunity to redefine the motives and to reinterpret their meaning within the new presentation. In the end, Larsen reveals emotions that had previously been buried within Calamity’s subconscious. Calamity must admit and finally accept these sentiments.

The orchestrated version of *Songs from Letters* presents an extension of the original version. Use of percussion and various instrumental techniques creates an additional color and texture which can not be heard from piano accompaniment alone. An important element within the dramatic work is tension. This conflict builds and releases via the strings and percussion. Additionally, flute flutter tongue and trills and clarinet trills mirror this tension and create color. The flute and clarinet present the characterization of Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok. However, the flute represents only the subconscious views and emotions of Calamity. The letters begin as a comforting means of correspondence to her daughter. Subsequently, Larsen’s *Songs from Letters* takes Calamity on a journey of self-discovery. Just as the context of Song V changes the meaning of certain motives and requires them to be reinterpreted, Calamity also transforms. Circumstances, such as blindness and death, require that Calamity’s subconscious emotions of fear and regret be recognized and accepted on a conscious level. The transformation of the motives transfers musically to Calamity’s character and is manifest in the flute characterization. This aspect of the characterization further completes the ecological concerns Larsen has for creating an opportunity for her listeners to decorate a theater in their mind and to extend the listening experience visually. For
this reason, Larsen possesses a well-rounded and dramatic piece of music in *Songs from Letters*.

In completing this study, a number of graduate papers aided my research. These papers, written by soprano performers, provide performance techniques and tips as well as some theoretical analysis. Harriet McCleary’s dissertation “The Solo Vocal Music of Libby Larsen,” Jeanenne Bezerra’s thesis “The Relationship Between Text and Music in the Works of Libby Larsen,” and Glenda Secrest’s dissertation “*Songs from Letters* and *Cowboy Songs* by Libby Larsen: Two different approaches to western mythology and western mythological figures” offer a performer’s insight into Larsen, Calamity Jane, and *Songs from Letters*. In the same vein, this monograph will further benefit soprano vocalists in their research prior to performing or writing about *Songs from Letters*. Many of the compositional techniques and concerns that Larsen utilizes in this *scena* transfer to a number of her other compositions. This monograph may serve as a basis of comparison to other works by Libby Larsen.
Bibliography


“Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey, 1880-1902.” Score. From Libby Larsen’s private collection.


Appendix A. Letter of Permission

12 August 2003

Ms. Andrea J. Mitternight
336 West Parker #7
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Dear Ms. Mitternight:

Libby Larsen
Songs from Letters

We now approve your request dated 7 August 2003 to reprint the text in its entirety and
musical excerpts of the aforesaid work from both the published edition and the orchestral
version in your dissertation at Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College.
The acknowledgment

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should appear therein. There will be no charge. Please write again if your dissertation is
published.

Yours very truly,

Oxford University Press

Brian Hill, Manager
Copyrights & Promotions
Music Department
direct line: 212/726 6048
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Appendix B. Text of *Songs from Letters* with Repetitions

**So like your Father’s (1880)**

Janey, a letter came today and a picture of you.
Your expression so like your father’s,
like your father’s,
brought back all the years.
Janey, a picture of you…
like your father’s,
brought back all the years.

**He Never Misses (1880)**

I met your father “Wild Bill Hickok” near Abilene.
A bunch of outlaws were trying to kill him.
I crawled through the brush to warn him,
I crawled through the brush to warn him,
Bill killed them all.
I’ll never forget…
blood running down his face,
blood running down his face while he used two guns.
I crawled through the brush to warn him.
I crawled through the brush to warn him.
Bill killed them all.
He never aimed and he was never known to miss.

**A Man Can Love Two Women (1880)**

Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey.
It kills love.
It kills love and all nice things.
Don’t let jealousy get you, Janey.
It drove your father from me.
I lost ev’rything I loved.
I lost ev’rything I loved.
I lost ev’rything I loved except for you.
A man can love two women,
love two women at a time.
He loved her and he still loved me because of you Janey.
because of you Janey.
A Working Woman (1882-1893)

Your mother works for a living.
One day I have chickens, and the next day feathers.
These days I’m driving a stagecoach.
For a while I worked in Russell’s saloon.
But when I worked there all the virtuous women planned to run me out of town,
run me out of town,
all the virtuous women planned to run me out of town,
so these days I’m driving a stagecoach.
Your mother works for a living.
I’ll be leaving soon to join Bill Cody’s Wild West Show.
I’ll ride a horse bareback, standing up,
shooting my Stetson hat twice, throwing it into the air and landing on my head.
I’ll ride a horse bareback, standing up,
shooting my Stetson hat twice, throwing it into the air and landing on my head,
landing on my head.
These are hectic days, like hell let out for noon.
I mind my own bus’ness, but remember the one thing the world hates is a woman who
minds her own bus’ness.
All the virtuous women have bastards and shotgun weddings.
I have nursed them through childbirth and my only pay is a kick in the pants when my
back is turned.
These other women are potbellied, hairy legged and they look like something the cat
dragged in.
I wish I had the pow’r to damn their souls to hell,
damn their souls to hell,
damn their souls to hell!
Your mother works for a living.

All I Have (1902)

I am going blind.
All hope of seeing you again is dead, Janey.
What have I ever done except one blunder after another?
All I have left are these pictures of you,
You and your father,
pictures,
All I have,
pictures,
All I have, all I have, Ah
I am going blind,
I am going blind.
Don’t pity me, Janey,
forgive my faults and all the wrong I did you.
Goodnight, little girl,
little girl,
Goodnight, little girl, and may God keep you from harm.

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Before I present the transcription of the interview, which occurred on July 12, 2003, I feel it necessary to describe briefly the interview. Because Larsen’s schedule is so busy and requires extensive travel, I decided against a telephone interview. Rather, I sought permission to email a list of questions pertaining to *Song from Letters*. She agreed to answer them and her assistant Abbie Betinis recorded the answers in .mp3 format. Libby Larsen chose to read the questions, which I have denoted in quotation marks, and then answer in her own words. Larsen’s comments are indicated with “LL:” so as to not confuse her comments with Abbie Betinis’, which are specified as “AB:”.

### The transcription

LL: So Andrea, we are going to answer your questions as best as we possibly can at the moment sitting on this park bench on a beautiful day in Minnesota. So, here we go. Okay, question number 1 is “In an interview with Harriet McCleary dated 1991, you said that you did not consider this piece to be a song cycle. I was wondering how you would characterize this piece formally?” [SHORT PAUSE] I would call this piece, um, a *scena*. Yes I would. And I thought of that as I was working on the piece. The pieces are, to my way of thinking, much more dramatic than traditional art song or *Lieder*. And while there is a grouping of songs, I consider them to all belong to each other, and it’s really more of a *scena* than it is a framed cycle. So that’s how I would formally call it – a *scena* for solo soprano and piano. Yep, that’s the way I conceived it! Because I’m interested in the art song concert; I’m interested in after 1950, what is the art song recital in this country? The reason I pinpoint 1950 is that’s when the mass culture became quite visual in its listening habits. The first half of the century we were thinking about being visual, but the second half of the century, we are visual in our listening habits. And I’ve been toying around in my choral works and my operatic works, but really more and more in songs that I compose, wanting to make a complete visual listening experience, if at all possible, in the theater of the mind.

AB: And the *scena* does that.

LL: The *scena* does that.

LL: Okay, so number 2 “I have read that the soprano and piano version of *Songs from Letters* was composed for Mary Elizabeth Poore in 1989.” That’s true. “Can you tell me more about the genesis of the piece, and how it became an orchestral work?” Yes, I can. Let me tell you how it became an orchestral work first. I decided to orchestrate the songs because I was making a recording with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and with Benita Valente. We were recording the *Songs of Light and Love*, which I had composed for her. And she and I were talking about what else might go on the recording, and we decided that *Songs from Letters* would work very well as an orchestrated *scena*. So I orchestrated it, it was my idea, and it was for the recording with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Now, the genesis of the piece – Mary Elizabeth Poore and her accompanist, who was a very good friend of mine, Benton Hess, that’s H-e-s-s, Benton, B-e-n-t-o-n, contacted me because Mary Elizabeth was going to give her debut

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concert at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. And she wanted a new group of songs for that recital, which is the perfect reason to commission (laughing), you know. And we talked a little bit about what she liked in songs and what kind of acting she liked. She had done a number of operas, and she said that she really preferred Hugo Wolf songs that would allow her a kind of dramatic presentation that Wolf, for instance, allows. And so I took that to heart, and of course had been reading, I read extensively, and I had been reading the book *Between Ourselves*, which is a volume of letters between mothers and daughters. And for a long time I had been wanting to write a piece based on the character from The Bridge over San Luis Rey.80 We are having mosquito problems, if you hear slapping it’s because we are slapping mosquitoes [laughing]. [Comments about the mosquitoes then continuing with interview.] So I had for a long time I wanted to write a song cycle based, a piece, not a cycle, a piece, based on one of the characters of The Bridge over San Luis Rey. And that character, her name slips my mind at the moment, but she was the mother of a very famous Spanish actress. A daughter who really mistreated the mother and wouldn’t write back, and it’s a very sad story. And at first I thought, “I think I’d like to pursue that.” But I couldn’t, I couldn’t get a text. I couldn’t wrap my mind around what that text would be. And in the meantime I came across these letters between Calamity Jane and her daughter Janey in the book *Between Ourselves*. And I knew that in fact that was the same content, but Calamity Jane and her daughter Janey are American, and I want to deal with American English in its formative stages and in all of its stages. And it was just a light bulb. And that’s just how it came to be.

AB: And it was dramatic.

LL: It was dramatic, absolute dramatic enough. And I didn’t tell Mary Elizabeth Poore, I just wrote the songs and gave them to her. (Laughing) she didn’t kill me, so I guess it was alright! But it worked out just fine, so really, that’s the genesis of the piece.

Now, you’re wondering in your **third question** “I had considered contrasting Cowboy Songs with Songs from Letters, but decided on a chapter on the orchestral version. Now, comparing the two versions of Songs from Letters, there seem to be a few changes that you made.” That is true, especially in the vocal line. “For example, in Song V ‘A Working Woman,’ the stagecoach motive [singing] ‘These days I’m riding a stagecoach’ uses a lower neighbor movement from G to F.” Yes, and in the piano version, I use stepwise falling 3rds. I can tell you that all of the vocal…. [Interruption to leave the mosquitoes.]

Now we’re sitting behind a pine tree. [A second relocation happens.] Okay, now we’re plugging into a building at the University of Minnesota, we’re plugged into the outside of a building, and we’re sitting on the ledge. Okay, now, we are talking about the changes in the vocal writing in the orchestral version, the changes between the orchestral version and the piano version. All of the changes in the orchestral version in the vocal line were made at the bequest [correcting] behest and request of Benita Valente, who asked, after working very hard on the songs, asked for these changes to be made in the vocal line to accommodate her voice. I made the changes, and then had to make the decision: do I leave the changes in the orchestral score to match the recording or do I

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80 Larsen is referring to the 1927 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder.
move the changes back to the piano version? And I felt that I needed to leave and wanted to leave, the changes that Benita made in the orchestral score to match the recording.

AB: There still are discrepancies though between the recording and the score.

LL: Are these mistakes?

AB: Oh, I don’t know. Maybe we should check it out.

LL: Andrea, we need to look into a few discrepancies to see if there are mistakes, but there are many changes, little changes in the vocal line that Benita made, and I kept because it is a different version. So you can choose either one, however, because the vocal line from the piano score works with the orchestral score.

AB: So it’s not a timbral decision?

LL: No, it was a vocal comfort decision, yep, vocal comfort decision.

LL: Okay, number 4, can I elaborate on the possible characterization in this piece or in music in general? [reading] “I am looking forward to getting into the orchestral version of Songs from Letters in my writing this summer. I hope to explore the possibility of characterization. Can you elaborate on possible characterization in this piece?” If I read your question right; the way I read your question has to do with the characterization of the entire piece in the choice of the motives. The tack piano motive, for instance, the opening motive of [LL sings the ostinato opening song 2, mm. 1-2] that motive and the sighing motive [LL sings the calm motive opening song 3, mm. 1-2], that moves throughout the piece, in a dramatic work, like this one; Sonnets from the Portuguese is another example of this kind of characterization; the queen songs, the Try Me, Good King songs; I try to create, not an atmosphere, but an ecology for the delivery of the words that moves the listener into their mind, into a theater in their mind, which the listener is free to decorate in any way, any way, shape, or form. But, I try to create a characterization, not in the singer, but in the music itself, which suggests that the words are being delivered in their own very special space, and not necessarily time and space, but space. So in Songs from Letters the three81 motives that I talked to you about, or just tried to sing for you, are really the three motives that create the space. The tack piano motive being that makeshift, ramshackle attempt to make a life in the West using tar paper, the only piano in town, and maybe one mahogany beam that somebody brought, you know, in their covered wagon, putting it together and that becomes the music hall. This kind of tinny sound, we know it’s music, we know it’s a music hall, but it is not Weill Recital Hall, and it never will be. That motive really wants to place the psychology of the piece there. And the [LL sings the ostinato opening song 2, mm. 1-2] motive [short break for the loud airplane sound flying over.] You could say that it’s kind of a galloping motive, but that’s not really what it is. What it is, it’s the asymmetry of movement that accompanies all of us who are trying to situate ourselves a new land. You know, there are no smooth surfaces; it’s not possible for a wheel to roll smoothly. And it wasn’t possible in this country for a wheel to roll smoothly until 1911, believe it or not, because 1911 was the year that we began to pave our roads in cement. Before that it was either paving bricks, or dirt, and no amount of planning, you know. It was not possible to roll in a symmetrical way.

AB: So the sounds of travel were….

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81 I believe that Larsen intended to say two motives rather than three motives. She does talk about other motives later in the interview.
LL: So the sounds of travel were very much different than that airplane that just went over, which is absolute smooth noise. So really, that’s about characterization. It’s how to create, it’s really not an atmosphere, it really is a psychological ecology for the delivery of the texts. And that makes them scenes and not song cycles, if that makes sense.

AB: And what about the sighing motive?

LL: Oh the [LL sings the calm motive opening song 3, mm. 1-2]. You would find more easily played on a guitar, a banjo, a fret, plucked instrument than you would on piano. That’s really much more of a guitar motive, the hand-held instruments that really settled the West, the hurdy-gurdies, those instruments. This was well before railroads, well no, this was about the same time as railroads, this particular text. But still, by and large the instruments west of the Hudson were hand-held instruments and piano, only a few gramophones, not too many.

So now, number 5. “It seems with Karen Payne’s Between Ourselves you found a strong and bold protagonist in Calamity that touched you.” That’s true. “Oftentimes you elaborate on her character. As a composer, that is important to me; however, I would also like to hear you elaborate on the process you used in transforming her letters into poetry to be used in the Songs from Letters.” Well, first of all, I didn’t transform the letters into poetry. They are prose. What I, but I can tell you, here’s how the process goes for me: I love to work in prose and when I begin to, I guess I would say, prune is not the right word, but prune is the word that comes to mind at the moment, is how to find the essential, singable words in a paragraph of prose. No. What are the words that really want to be highlighted through intonation? And so, when I look at prose, I look at it with a pencil, and I will very lightly underline the words that, if I were to eliminate everything else from that paragraph, the essential words would be there.

AB: Like chipping away at a stone or something.

LL: Yeah, it is. And oftentimes I find that if I eliminate, that many of the adjectival phrases, those become the characterization in the music. You don’t need to sing those phrases, you don’t need to sing the adverbs; you don’t need to sing the adjectives. You need to sing the nouns and the verbs. The verbs are very important because that’s where the tempo and progression, it really comes out of the verbs, not the nouns. And so the nouns and the verbs will rise up off the page, and the adjectives and the adverbs will ask whether or not they really need to be set. Now, an interesting thing is the articles, like “the”, and many of those don’t need to be set. What’s really interesting though is that the conjunctions “but”, “and”, “or”, those you have to be very careful about, you know? Because in prose, the “buts” and the “ands” and the “ors” are where the meaning lies. And so I look very carefully at the conjunctions and try to understand if the “buts” and “ands” and “ors” are ironic or if they are self-defensive mechanisms, which often an “and” clause is a self-defense mechanism in an explanation. Yep. “Or” is an interesting one also because it gives you clues to the committed nature of the person speaking the words. So that really is the process I use. Now secondary to that process is to try and find end rhyme. If it’s a very well written piece of prose, you find that the vowels in the words that rise up off the page almost always, you’ll find a vowel pattern in that paragraph. It could be vowels that are all “o-u” vowels, like “soup” and “through” you know, or a long “a” – “these days I’m driving a stagecoach” you know. And you
begin to...I often find that in prose, that’s really settable. That there are, maybe unconscious, on the part of the writer; or maybe it’s not, if a writer were sitting here maybe they would probably say, “No, that’s the hard work of it!” But yeah, looking then for the vowels is very, very important. Of course that depends, now I’m thinking of consonants. If in the, in the Black Mountain School of poets, you really want to look at the consonants. So I also try to really do my homework as to, “When was this writer writing, What were the conventions of the time, and How did the writer place themselves in the literary conventions of the time?” in order to understand if the word is meant to be sung in a Victorian style, you know, or in a contemporary style.

AB: That’s a whole lot of work.

LL: It’s a lot of work, you know, it’s a lot of work, but that’s where you find the music. That’s why the music comes out of the words. That’s just my process. And in the case of Calamity Jane, of course she was a Bridge Victorian, right? And so she was writing in what we would consider rather Standard English. In her era, you could have also considered it extraordinarily avant-garde. You know, if she were Gertrude Stein she would have been avant-garde. But of course she was unschooled, so all that has great bearing on how you set those words “These days I’m driving a stagecoach.” It’s very different if it were a Victorian writer you know, but she’s not a Victorian writer, she’s a pioneer writer. And she wasn’t even writing to be a writer; these are memoirs. Anyway, that’s probably more than you wanted to know, but there you go! Okay.

So six-a, “a central theme throughout this piece is recollection – recollection with Calamity’s memory of Bill, and in the end, her impending need to use recollection for Janey as Calamity is going blind and will be unable to see her pictures.” [Still reading, but not quoting] Do I want to talk about this or other themes? Well, I can talk about recollection in direct relationship to the [LL sings the Calm Motive from the opening of Song 3, mm 1-2] motive, because that motive is recollection, that motive. Whenever you hear that motive in the piano, you never hear it in the voice; it’s always in the piano, that is a moment in which we know that Calamity is recalling or about to recall, although she doesn’t sing that she’s recalling. She never says “Ah, I remember”, she just says “pictures” you know. And we are to understand that in her day to have a picture meant months; in our day to have a picture means seconds, with digital camera. So that recollection motive, which is never tonal until the very last page of the songs....

AB: And why is that?

LL: Because Calamity was yearning, always yearning, you know. Yearning to be, she wasn’t yearning to be with her daughter, she yearning to be the mother that she couldn’t be. And that’s why she was writing the letters, which Janey was never to read until after she was gone. And so when she says, “Good night little girl”, and the recollection motive resolves, that really is to me the saddest moment of the entire scene, because she is resolved that she will never, will never see her daughter again, you know. Nor will she ever be able to be the mother that she wanted to be. It’s just terrible; it’s so sad, you know? It’s terrible, just a victim of, you know, of the culture that she, in which she was pioneering. So that motive is really carefully constructed throughout the whole group of songs. In a way kind of shamefully manipulative in that it’s heading for that moment of resolution, which is, which is, I don’t know if it’s a feminine resolution, you know. It’s a resolve, you know.
AB: And it’s closure?
LL: It’s closure, but it’s not heroic, well, it is heroic closure. It’s, unfortunately it’s not a happy ending, but there it is, finally in a major key, which makes it all the sadder. You know, that life is beautiful and harmonious in its sadness. Sometimes the most harmony lies in the resolution of the sadness. Not that it’s happy, not resolved to be happy, but there’s great beauty in, in sadness. Anyway, [sighs] the sun’s going down.

Let me see, and then six-b, “Along a similar thought, how important is it for your audience to recall tonal centricity and use key association as they listen to your works?”
AB: In that case it would be….
LL: Yeah, in this case, it’s very important, very important. Also the tack piano motive is important that it’s on white keys, yeah to me. And, I think I know why [laughing].
AB: [Laughing] make up a good answer.
LL: No, I think I know why. I don’t really plan out tonal centricity, and I don’t, I don’t pre-compose, because if I did, then I wouldn’t be in service of my instincts. You know, and all the hard work that I do is so that I can put all the techniques in the service of instinct, and let instinct write the piece, right. And then I have to go back and find what the process is that instinctually is at work in the piece and the white, [correcting] the tack piano, the [LL sings the saloon, tack piano motive from Song 4, m. 11], it’s a lot on white keys, which has to do with functional keyboard harmony at the period of time we’re talking about in the West was not German contrapuntal keyboard functional harmony. Most of the music that was being performed on the pianos in the music halls, the hurdy-gurdies, the mining tents, you know, was really done by ear, and it was music of folk songs. Not arrangements of folk songs, but just music that grew out of folk song singing. And in particular, English and Scottish and British folk song singing and so a lot of the filigree work was really done just on the white keys. And there was not much, much need to modulate in that music. If you wanted to modulate, you just jump from I to V instead of modulating through the twelve notes….
AB: Like the German music….
LL: …Like German music of the period, which was being taught in the academy. But in the, not in the academy, the music that keyboards and fret boards you know where playing was much more about parallelism at the time. So, that’s why that motive, I think, ends up almost always in the same place in the same key area.
AB: Are there other instances like that? Are there other keys associations in other movements that are important?
LL: I would have to go back and really look at the piece to remember if they are. And I’ll just do that quickly. And if you want me to elaborate more on this, I would, but I’d rather that you find key relationships [laughing], and then tell me about them. [PAUSE] You know what? You know, now I remember. Oftentimes I will end the vocal line, the tonality of the vocal line, Song 1 [singing] “like your father’s brought back all the years”. That wants to become the 7th to the next key area, which is F. So it really wants to lead into F through the vocal line, oddly enough; even though in the piano, you have a hint of F in the left hand in the last two bars of the first song, but Bb major in the right hand. So you don’t know where you’re going to go, you know. But it’s the E that suggests the F of the next song and, and ties over to the E of the left hand in the next song. So you really switch the F, you really invert the left hand, which is playing the F motive [LL sings the
Bell-Like Motive in bass, Song 1, mm 13-17] moved into the right hand, and then the E from the vocal line moves into the left hand. Yeah, now I’m going to see if I did that again [laughing]. So we end the second song exactly the way it began, with the F in right hand, the 5th, and the E-D-E in the left hand. And then, I would call that F major-ish.

AB: Ish?

LL: F major-ish. I would. [PAUSE] You know, I’d, I would have to really go back and think through this. Usually there is, it’s just I haven’t got it right on the top of my head at the moment. Yeah, so you tell me [laughing]. Well now, let’s see.

AB: Well, I think that’s it.

LL: Did we get it? Okay, so at least that gets us going Andrea, and then we can come back with more questions. And now that Abbie makes me sit down with this, this works really well.
Andrea Jean Mitternight, a native of Louisiana, was born on July 4, 1972. In 1990 she enrolled at Louisiana State University to study music. There, she studied composition with Dr. Dinos Constantinides and Dr. Stephen David Beck. Upon graduating with her Bachelor of Music degree in 1995, she enrolled at the University of South Carolina to begin work on her master’s degree. After studying with Dr. Reginald Bain and Dr. Gordon Goodwin, Mitternight received her Master of Music in 1997. Upon her return to Louisiana State University, she continued to study with Dr. Stephen David Beck to earn her Doctor of Musical Arts.

Mitternight writes music for solo, chamber, orchestral, and electronic media. A number of her compositions are published with Conners Publication. Additionally, she is a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, the International Alliance for Women in Music, the Society for Electroacoustic Music in the United States, the National Association for Composers in the United States of America, and the Society of Composers, Inc. Her music has been performed throughout the United States and in Greece, and she has received several commissions from Southern artists. Also, she has won several awards from the Music Teachers National Association.