A Conductor’s Guide to Joan Szymko’s Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey

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A CONDUCTOR’S GUIDE TO JOAN SZYMKO’S
SHADOW AND LIGHT: AN ALZHEIMER’S JOURNEY

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
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B.M., Oklahoma Baptist University, 1991
M.M., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995
August 2022
Love bears all things
believes all things
hopes all things
endures all things
love never fails.

—I Corinthians 13:7-8
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Abstract

Joan Szymko (pronounced SHIM-koh) is an American composer-conductor with a prolific output of choral music. With over 100 choral pieces in print, her works are regularly heard at national and international festivals and competitions, including regional and national American Choral Directors Association conferences. She was selected to present at the 2020 World Symposium on Choral music in Auckland, New Zealand, which was unfortunately canceled due to the COVID pandemic.

Szymko’s only major choral/orchestral work, Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey, has been performed three times: in April 2016 by Eugene Vocal Arts; in September 2019 by the Oregon Repertory Singers; and in June 2019 by the Portara Ensemble in Nashville, Tennessee. In 2014, Eugene Vocal Arts commissioned Szymko to create a libretto that focused on Alzheimer’s dementia and compose the music for a major choral/orchestral work. After eight months of investigation, which included interviews with patients in various stages of the disease and their care-partners, as well as extensive medical research, Szymko conceived a work in three parts, totaling sixteen movements, and requiring 70 minutes to perform. Szymko developed the text for the work from patient and care-partner quotations, classic and contemporary poetry, scripture, hymnody, and her own observations. It should be noted that “care-partners” is a term Szymko uses to define those afflicted by Alzheimer’s and their loved ones.

This dissertation will serve as a conductor’s guide to Joan Szymko’s Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. This project includes a detailed examination of the work’s history and interviews with the composer and the commission conductor. A textual analysis follows, including a comprehensive exegesis and structural analysis of all texts. The multifarious
resources for *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* mean that a critical evaluation of the work has to explore the selection process for each movement. A further examination of the relationship of music and text is gained through a conductor’s analysis of the score, including a bar analysis using the Julius Herford method.\(^1\) The inclusion of a conductor’s preparation guide for rehearsal and performance will conclude the project.

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Introduction

Need for the Study

Despite Joan Szymko’s prolific choral compositional output, and the consistency with which her works are performed, there has been little academic research done on any of her pieces. Szymko has written almost exclusively for choral groups in various combinations and with numerous accompaniments. Szymko’s first major work, *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*, has been well received by audiences. The Eugene Vocal Arts Chamber Choir won the Ernst Bacon Memorial Award for the Performance of American Music, 2016-17 (community division). Additionally, AO Films was presented as winner of the 2017 Oregon Independent Film Festival for Best Documentary regarding the creative process of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. Surely, these positive reactions warrant further academic investigation.

A thorough investigation of Szymko’s compositional style in terms of her melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic language, and her attentiveness to text setting provides insight to performance practice and serves conductors as an aid when they make interpretative decisions in rehearsal and performance. It is vital to provide scholarship on contemporary composers and their works. This study supports and encourages the creation of culturally relevant music, and seeks to inspire conductors to create programs that, in part, speak to today’s issues. Ultimately, the analysis and study of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* provides exposure and promises to initiate many performances of this new major work, while encouraging a deeper look into Szymko’s choral opus.
Delimitations

This dissertation examines the musical and textual elements, as well as the architectural structure of the major work, *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. This dissertation also addresses the composer’s writing style as it pertains to this work. Compositional traits that have influenced her conception have been examined. However, due to Szymko’s long and diverse list of choral works, it is not the intention of the author to compare her overall compositional style with that of any or all her other choral works.

In interviewing two conductors who have successfully performed *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*, the author uncovered each conductor’s approach and understanding of the work, and especially revealed the pedagogical challenges that they discovered. The purpose of the research is not to make a thorough list of the performance considerations each conductor made. In addition, it is not the intention to make a comparative analysis of each conductor’s interpretation of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. General stylistic considerations such as articulation, dynamics, and tempo account for the discussion of performance practice techniques.

While current research is discovering more and more that mental and physical stimulation through music, or music therapy, is helpful to patients with memory issues, the author will not pursue a case for using music for therapeutic treatment or healing. These concerns may simply surface as part of an individual’s Alzheimer journey and will be reported as such.
Sources

Due to the absence of scholarly research on any of Szymko’s compositions, the predominant form of information was gained through interviews. These interviews include the composer herself, the commissioning conductor, Dr. Diane Retallack, and one other conductor who has performed this masterwork, Dr. Ethan Sperry. These conductors provide insight about the music, as well as about rehearsal strategies they developed, obstacles they overcame, and what they would change should they undertake the performance of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* in the future. The author conducted the interviews for the sole purpose of gaining data. Additional information was gained through previous interviews in formats such as newspaper, documentary film, articles, or web blogs as well as writings by the composer, program notes and reviews of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*.

Structure

Chapter One focuses on the commission by the Eugene Vocal Arts Chamber Choir. The genesis of the topic of Alzheimer’s is uncovered. Also provided is the source for the discovery of the numerous texts she chose, or wrote herself, and what ultimately led Szymko to include them. Of particular interest is the impetus prompting Szymko to shift from an initially small, commissioned piece to a large multi-movement work.

Chapter Two contains a textual analysis of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. This chapter investigates the various texts Szymko chose, and the placement of these texts throughout the work, so that an informed architectural structure emerges. Moreover, a brief biography for each writer is included.
Chapter Three contains a musical analysis of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey.* Utilizing the Julius Herford method, this chapter illuminates the musical form, melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic construction, and contrasts various textures and tempi. It also explores overarching themes and motives that connect the work on a larger level.

Chapter Four elaborates on the practical considerations for conductors who might choose to perform *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey.* The insight of the two conductors who performed the work along with the author’s study sheds much needed light on rehearsal strategies and vocal or instrumental challenges. Although the work is not intended to be staged, optional visual enhancements are explored.

In the broadest context, this project sheds light on Joan Szymko as a composer worthy of consideration for her choral output. More pointedly, readers are encouraged to explore, research and certainly program this profoundly moving work regarding a disease that is cruel and unrelenting.
Chapter 1. Genesis and Commission

The genesis of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* began with Dr. Diane Retallack. Retallack is the Executive Director of the Eugene Concert Choir Organization, which includes three performing ensembles: Eugene Concert Choir, Eugene Vocal Arts, and the Eugene Concert Orchestra. Retallack’s mother and grandmother both had Alzheimer’s disease, so she understood the disease better than most people. After her mother had been gone several years, she decided she wanted to do a musical project totally devoted to Alzheimer’s. Her intent was to give those affected by the disease, including patients and “care-partners,” a voice. She went on to say, “every monumental thing we go through is commemorated through music: wars, and funerals, and weddings and celebrations – we as humans express ourselves through art about everything that is a major event.”

Retallack then applied for a grant from the Creative Heights Initiative to facilitate her dream of a choral orchestral work devoted to Alzheimer’s. According to Retallack, their main goal of the Creative Heights Initiative was to provide grants to projects that take some level of risk. She knew her idea would offer more risk than the organization might be comfortable with, but she applied anyway. Ultimately, the first-time release of the grant awarded her $125,000 to be used over a two-year period. It was so new, the Creative Heights Initiative did not know how to administer the grant, so they sent her a check for the full amount and asked her to submit a three-page report at the end of the project briefly detailing what had been done with the money.

Because the grant came with little to no conditions, Retallack had great freedom, in all aspects of the project. One major benefit of the grant money was it provided funds for a

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2 Diane Retallack, interview by author, Baton Rouge, January 21, 2022.
3 Retallack, interview.
documentary to be filmed. The company, A.O. Films, agreed to make a short film of 7-12 minutes regarding the creation of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. However, the filmmakers ended up following Szymko and Retallack over 18 months and delivering a film of 51 minutes, chronicling the entire project from its conception to the first performance in Eugene, Oregon.

Another result of the grant money was that it helped Retallack form an orchestra, which still exists, and is now part of the Eugene Concert Choir Organization. They worked with unions, held auditions, and wrote a master agreement for musicians, to form the orchestra. Without the grant, Retallack would have hired outside orchestras to come to Eugene and play.

The last substantial benefit of the grant money’s freedom was connected to the composer. Retallack immediately looked to composer, conductor, Joan Szymko to compose the work. Even though Szymko had not written an extended work on this scale before, Retallack thought she was an extraordinary artist who was quite capable of composing a 30-minute work. Joan accepted the commission, but she had no experience with Alzheimer’s. Retallack’s belief was that it made her write better. Because of the grant money, Szymko was able to do a lot of research on the subject before composing. She visited care facilities and homes where she conducted interviews with patients in varying stages of the disease, as well as the care-partners. She spent time reading poetry, books, and articles while exploring Alzheimer’s social media groups.

The research Szymko did resulted in her collecting many books regarding the disease itself and other books of poetry by people who had already made an Alzheimer’s journey. She did not use any story from an interview as text. However, she did use the interviews and other research to inform her writing of two movements and some connective material. Szymko

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4 Retallack, interview.
5 Ibid.
selected three poems from the anthology, *Forgetting Home, Poems about Alzheimer’s*. She chose two texts from the Bible. Szymko used only three poems that were not directly related to Alzheimer’s, while the rest of the poetry was written by a care-partner or a patient. She chose the text for the work in an unusually visceral manner. Szymko claimed to get a feeling in her body, a kind of tingling, and she knew that the text she was reading would fit well in the structure of the work.

When Retallack approached Szymko to write a work on Alzheimer’s she asked Szymko to create a choral orchestral work of about 30 minutes in length. However, very early on Szymko knew, based on all the research she was doing, that that was not going to happen. She told Retallack that it was more likely going to be 45 minutes. By the time she finished, *Shadow and Light* was over an hour at 70 minutes in length. Retallack believed the reason it grew was because Alzheimer’s is not one dimensional. There are so many stories to tell, and the more research Szymko did the larger the work became. Szymko’s ability to compose in different styles helps present these many stories in interesting engaging ways. However, Szymko admitted, “the reason it became such a massive work is because of how I decided to construct the piece…I constructed it like a big arc…like a concert program, to tell a story, to tell a bigger story, and that story was from the perspective of a person with Alzheimer’s.”

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7 Joan Szymko, interview by author, Baton Rouge, January 27, 2022.
Chapter 2. Textual Analysis

The texts for *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* come from sixteen different sources, both ancient and contemporary. Even though some texts were not written specifically with Alzheimer’s dementia in mind, most are. Szymko’s extensive research and abundant interviews with Alzheimer’s patients and care-partners supplied her material to create faithful renderings of situations and feelings of the many affected by the Alzheimer’s experience. Once her research was finished, her feeling was that all the people involved need to simply be heard, especially the patients. Consequently, both patients and care-partners receive sections devoted to their words.

The work is made up of three parts. Part 1 named, “The Cloud of Forgetting,” has texts dedicated to the Alzheimer’s patient. Its overarching theme is connected to fear that is felt by the patient. The texts for Part 2, titled “Uncontainable Night,” deal with the care-partner’s experiences while providing support. These experiences are accompanied by a sense of frustration, burden, and duty. Lastly, Part 3, or “I and Thou,” deals with the symbiotic relationship between the patient and the care-partner. Themes found in this section include regret, loneliness, and finally love. All the poems and prose share a deep connection that ultimately represent the arduous journey from shadow to light.

I Felt a Cleaving

I felt a cleaving in my mind 1
As if my brain had split;
I tried to match it, seam by seam, 3
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join 5
Unto the thought before,
But sequence ravelled out of reach 7
Like balls up on a floor. 8

The poem, “I Felt a Cleaving” was written by the American poet, Emily Dickinson, and was published posthumously. The text for the first movement of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey does not specifically deal with Alzheimer’s. However, Szymko selected it for its connection to the brain and the mental capacity that is lost.

Dickinson’s metaphors of a “cleaver splitting the brain” or stitching unmatched seams aptly describe the brain’s disconnect. The irony for Dickinson as well as for those with Alzheimer’s is that this is an assuredly fatal event, but one in which the person does not instantly die as expected. They continue to live on in misery. The second metaphor Dickinson uses is that of a seamstress futilely trying to sew together pieces of cloth that were torn apart. However, the seams cannot be connected no matter how hard the person tries. Similarly, patients with Alzheimer’s often struggle to understand what is happening to them. They try to live their lives as they would always, but they soon learn their lives will never be the same. It can never be put back together the way it once was. The last metaphor Dickinson uses is that of knitting. Lines 5-6 depict someone trying to join thoughts together, but to no avail. Likewise, Alzheimer’s patients battle to connect thoughts in a cohesive manner so that they make sense. Lines 7-8 appear to reflect an utter loss of control. The balls of yarn unravel beyond reach, unable to be rewound or restored. Alzheimer’s patients also experience the hopelessness and loss rather than experiencing restoration or healing. They are desperately lost.

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Tangled Tango

“I'm going to give you the names of three objects: 1 shoe, tree, car – can you repeat those three words?”

“Shh Shoe... Train... I can't remember the other one.”

“Okay then, please repeat this phrase: no ifs ands or buts.”

“No - no ifs... no... Nothing fits...”

“Okay, can you please spell the word, ‘world’ backward?”

D...D R – O -- W...

My world is backward, upside down and inside out
My world is backward, upside down and turned about
No ifs ands or buts about it
My words and thoughts get tangled deep inside my brain
I worry all the time about my lapses, and I feel ashamed
No ifs ands or buts about it
No ifs ands or buts about it
And just the other day I lost my way on my way home
My heartbeat raced as panic swept into my very bones
No ifs ands or buts about it -- No ifs ands or buts about it.

“You have dementia, probably of the Alzheimer's type.”

The opening text of “Tangled Tango” is prose, but then shifts to poetry. There is an interesting story concerning the conception of this text. Szymko learned early on that the commissioning choir director, Diane Retallack, had a very close relationship with Alzheimer’s. Both her mother and her grandmother died from the disease, so it was very fresh and painful to her. She decided to try to strengthen her brain to ward off the effects of the disease should there be a genetic connection. Retallack learned that ballroom dancing is one way people can exercise their brains, so she began to dance. This choral tango is for Diane and her familial struggle.

The second thing to note is that Szymko wrote this text about Alzheimer victims in general. The narrative portion used parts of the universal Mini-Mental State Exam. This is a

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9 Joan Szymko, Portland, 2015.
10 Szymko, interview.
cognitive test that is performed to determine if patients have Alzheimer’s. Typically, the patient is asked to repeat three words in order and is also asked to repeat a phrase, which in this instance is, “no ifs, ands, or buts.” Sometimes a patient is asked to spell a word backward. Line 11 includes the second question the patient was asked in the Mini-Mental State Exam, “no ifs, ands, or buts about it,” which becomes a kind of refrain from this point forward. Szymko highlights this area by introducing the chorus for the first time. The soloist continues sharing her narrative and the shame she feels. It is during line 12 that the word “tangled” is used. Tangles is a word used by doctors and scientists treating Alzheimer’s to explain the abnormal accumulation of protein inside neurons. Knowing this, Szymko decided to use alliteration in the title, connecting the medical with the familiar.

In lines 14 and 15, Szymko brings back the Mini-Mental State Exam refrain, which she uses as “connective tissue” throughout the piece. The poem ends with a final refrain of “no ifs, ands, or buts,” before the patient hears the test results: “You have dementia, probably of the Alzheimer’s type.”

**Memory Aids**

This is the paper that gives the date. 1
This is the kettle to boil the water.
This is a china breakfast plate.
This is a note to call my daughter.

This is coffee, I drink it black. 5
This is toast, and I eat it plain.
These are the thoughts I keep on track
To hurry them through my daughter's brain.

These are things I need to say
To sound as usual on the phone. 10

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11 Ibid.
13 Szymko, interview.
The longer I keep my child at bay,
The longer my life is still my own.14

The poetry for the third movement, “Memory Aids” was written by Gail White. White is a self-proclaimed “formalist,” which simply means she writes poems in the traditional rhyme and meter of English verse. The poem “Memory Aids” was included in the anthology Forgetting Home, Poems about Alzheimer's. When writing this particular poem, White attempted to put herself in the place of someone who knows that something is going wrong and is trying to stay in control. Szymko found the poem so compelling she decided to include the text and use it in the first section.

Lines 1 through 4 detail a newly diagnosed Alzheimer’s routine of identifying things within her home so she does not forget what to call them. It is inferred that there may be some forgetting already happening, and the new patient is trying to hide this from her daughter. It is noticeable that the phrase which is repeated the most in the entire movement is, “this is a note to call my daughter.” This is clearly the most important item on her list, although it is the one item on which she cannot afford to make a mistake.

The poet moves beyond lists to a description of actions. Lines 5 through 6 begin with, “This is toast, and I eat it plain.” This statement supposes the patient is not just forgetting what things are, but what she is to do with them. The thrice repeated text, “These are the thoughts I keep on track,” reflects a sense of panic, which Szymko captures. The patient’s review of the items is necessary for the appearance of normalcy when visiting with her daughter on the phone. Of course, the even longer-term effect will be that if the mother can convince the daughter

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everything is fine, she will be able to live independently indefinitely, something she clearly treasures.

**This Is What We Fear**

“Those three words I gave you earlier, can you recall them?”

Shame, Fear, Stigma

“I'm afraid of being dependent- of being a burden.”

“I'm afraid of losing control; Of being out of control.”

“I'm afraid of being abandoned, a burden -- pitied.” 5

“I'm afraid of life without memories, without meaning.”

“I have reached a point of where I know I don't know

I just don't know when I don't know.

“This living unknown frightens me more than death.”

This is what we fear 10

No sight, no sound

No taste or touch or smell

Nothing to think with

Nothing to love or link with.17 14

“This Is What We Fear” opens with a version of the Mini-Mental State Exam in which the soloist is asked to repeat the words she was given earlier. She does not even attempt to recall the original words, but rather shares her raw feelings of “shame, stigma, fear.” What follows are more spoken lines, some by the soloist and some by other people in the chorus, which describe fears that grip many Alzheimer’s patients. Szymko wrote the text for the prose from lines 1-6 based on her research and not any one individual. Lines 7-9 were written by Richard Taylor.

Taylor was a former psychologist who was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer’s. He lived and spoke in front of audiences for ten years after he was diagnosed and wrote a collection of essays describing his gradual deterioration. Szymko used one of his most profound statements regarding fear to end the opening section and segue to a brutally honest text by Phillip Larkin.

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15 Szymko, 2015.
Szymko excerpted lines 10-14 from a much larger poem by Larkin titled, “Aubade.” The complete poem comes from his Complete Poems. Aubade is a term from the French that is a song poem in praise of the dawn. However, this poem is much bleaker. The subject matter is about the fear of death rather than Alzheimer’s. However, Szymko used these five lines to sum up what is feared most by patients: being alone in utter darkness.

**By Night**

By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loveth: 1
I saw him but I found him not. 19

“The tonight, I just want to look into your eyes and see 3
60 beautiful years of my life looking back at me.” 20

“By Night” opens part II of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey titled, “Uncontainable Night.” The focus now shifts from the patient to the care-partner. As a result, the soloist in this short movement is a different voice part. Szymko uses different voice parts to represent the patient and care-givers. The text of “By Night” comes from the Song of Solomon chapter three, verse one, found in the Old Testament of the Bible. Almost all commentators agree that this verse is describing a woman who is missing her lover so much that she is searching for him in her dreams. However, her search is fruitless as she cannot find him. Szymko has used this ancient text to help the listener imagine what it might be for a caregiver to miss the partner. Whether from the actual death of the partner, the death of the partner’s personality, or the inability to communicate with a beloved, the loneliness on the part of the care-partner is still deep and very real. Szymko is giving them a much-needed voice.

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18 Ibid.
19 Song of Solomon 3:1, King James Version.
20 Karen Kaplan Perlmutter, “House of Memories”
Lines 3 and 4 come from an excerpt from “House of Memories” by Karen Kaplan Perlmutter. The spoken words shared by the soloist describe the care-partner’s wish to connect with the patient through a lifetime of shared memories.

Sundowning

1.
This white. 1
That yellow. This blue.
No matter what color pill
I crush into the applesauce, this blue bowl,
to feed you and myself, one 5
full night of sleep, one night
without this wandering. That weeping.
Without the long rattle of doors.

2.
Each evening that same urge to slip
this lumbering form, to step from its wreckage as from a 10 robe
dropped to the floor.
Each evening the struggle to ditch the feeble disguise
of body, this skin, this jerry-built cage
of bones that holds you, like the rescued starling, 15 disconsolate
and thrashing against its cardboard box.

3.
Each evening that blue persistence,
that voice, telling you to keep an appointment,
to catch the bus, to report to a job 20
lost 15 years ago, to keep your word,
to collect the debt, to make things square.
Each evening the struggle to take off your coat, to sit,
rest, lie back, to be still.
To sleep one night without this broken clock 25
that is you, still chiming
in this still-blue hour of evening,
Telling you, you are late, overdue.
You are expected somewhere important hours ago.
Years. And you rise, rise 30
like bad clockwork. Like I have forgotten.
Like I don't understand.
Like I never understand
the living-room drapes are engulfed in flame.
Like the whole damn house of mind 35
is burning down around you, and the walls are all swallowing their doors.\textsuperscript{21} 

The poem “Sundowning” is from a book of poetry by Sean Nevin titled, \textit{Oblivio Gate}. The book contains many poems, which combine to create a story about a man named Solomon who is battling Alzheimer’s disease. Readers not only get to hear from Solomon, but they also hear the voices of loved ones traveling on the journey alongside Solomon. The poem, “Sundowning,” is the voice of one of the care-partners trying to aid him during an episode of sundowning.

Sundowning episodes in Alzheimer’s patients prevent them from being able to sleep as they become obsessed with something.\textsuperscript{22} The obsession could be working on a task they believe has to be completed immediately. Sometimes they wander round aimlessly or leave their residence without telling anyone. Consequently, as the scene opens in lines 1-8, the care-partner is crushing pills to put in the patient’s applesauce with the hope it will help the patient to sleep and thus, help the care-partner to get some sleep. This is the first time Nevin introduces the color blue; the pill and the bowl, mundane and dull. That descriptor will be seen later in the third section. The caregiver is seeking relief in lines 7-8 from the patient who is wandering, weeping, and rattling doors at night.

The second section of the poem, lines 9-17, describes how the patient is trying to escape an earthly form as imagined by the care-partner. This is recounted vividly in two different scenes. In lines 10-12, the easy escape is to step from the “wreckage” of a body “as a robe dropped to the floor.” The second, more violent escape in lines 13-17, entails the patient trying to

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
“ditch this feeble disguise of a body…like a rescued starling, disconsolate and thrashing against its cardboard box.”

In the third section, lines 18-22 the care-partner relates some of the tasks over which the patient obsesses; some of which have not been done in 15 years. It is noticeable the voice leading the obsessive behavior is labeled as, “the blue persistence, that voice” as if it were a dull, dim, and tenacious sound the patient cannot stop.

In lines 23-27, the caregiver shifts from relating a list of obsessions to recounting the daily struggle to get the patient to relax and rest. He compares the patient to a “broken clock” that continues to chime. Then, in line 27, Nevin again uses the word “blue,” this time to describe the night. Following another broken clock refrain, the patient accuses the care-partner of inattention. Hysteria reigns as the patient insists that they leave. Lines 34-37 depict the patient as uncontrollably trying to explain to the care-partner that they must leave before they are trapped in their “house of mind,” which is “burning down around you, and the walls are all swallowing their doors.”

A Choice

“I'm going to give you three more words to remember: 1 heartbreak, stress, resilience”

There are moments when you have a choice:
fall apart or take a deep breath and just do what needs to be done.
Feel a new loneliness. 5
And a new strength. 24

The text of lines 1-2 of “A Choice” is spoken in yet another version of the Mini-Mental State Exam. It pertains to the thoughts and feelings of the care-partner who will suffer heartbreak

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23 Szymko, 2015.
and stress, while somehow finding a resilience through the loss. The response to lines 1-2 is the text for the rest of the movement found in lines 3-6.

The prose for lines 3-6, was excerpted from a graphic memoir written by Sarah Leavitt titled, *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer’s, My Mother and Me*. Szymko found this story to be one of the most moving she encountered while researching for *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. Leavitt’s mother had early onset dementia starting in her early 50’s. She recalls going upstairs and finding her mother in the bathroom with feces everywhere and having to clean it up. Afterwards, she writes the following text, “There are moments when you have a choice: fall apart or take a deep breath and just do what needs to be done.”

Loneliness is a fear felt by both patient and care-partner. The use of the word “new” also implies that loneliness has been felt before, but this time it is fresh and deep. However, the last line of prose declares that the care-partner’s new strength can provide love and support.

**Lead, Kindly Light**

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst the encircling gloom, 1
Lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home,  
Lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see 5 
The distant scene; One step enough for me.  

The poem, “Lead, Kindly Light,” was written in 1833, by John Henry Newman. Newman, an Anglican priest, who later in life left the church of England to become a Catholic priest. The poem has been included in a number of hymnals over the years and sung to differing tunes with the most common being LUX BENIGNA.

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Szymko was drawn to this hymn because of its text, but never found inspiration to set it to music until Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. Her desire to make this a universal work resonated in the text, and she felt listeners would identify with its pleas for help. However, she decided to use only the first verse of poetry for this movement.

The first line immediately focuses on prayer for guidance, addressing a higher power as the source of illumination. “The encircling gloom” resonates with patients of Alzheimer’s and their loved ones as the disease rarely presents itself suddenly. It most often sneaks up quietly and subtly as its darkness descends. Line 2 is the first outright cry for guidance. The worsening darkness culminates in line 6 with no desire to see the larger view on the path — only the next step. In this final statement of the poem Szymko comments: “One day at a time. One step at a time. One moment. Now. This is all you have is now. And so, by the end of this whole piece that's all that they [the patient and care-partner] have is the now. And whatever fleeting connection can be felt in that now...”

**Take Me Home**

“I want to go home; my friend’s mother says 1
over and over, even though this is the house
she has lived in for 50 -- some years.”

Are we going home?
Are we going home now? 5
Take me home.
I want to go home.
When are we going home?

The opening three lines of text to “Take Me Home” are spoken. They contain an excerpt from the poem “House Behind Trees, 1906-1907,” by Barbara Crocker. A painting by the same

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27 Szymko, interview.
29Szymko 2015.
name inspired Crocker to write a poem about Alzheimer’s patients and their universal request to go home. That request to go home can be from patients in a care facility, or in this case, the home in which a patient has lived for more than 50 years. Regardless, it is an appeal that every care-partner will hear at some point.

Lines 4, 5, and 8 are simple questions concerning the patient’s desire to go home, wherever or whatever that may be. Yet, by lines 6-7, Alzheimer’s aggressive, belligerent side demands to be taken home.

In This Uncontainable Night

Quiet friend who has come so far 1
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.  
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength. 5
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself into wine.

In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses, 10
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.30

The poetry for “In This Uncontainable Night” comes from “Sonnets to Orpheus / Part Two, XXIX” and “IN PRAISE OF MORTALITY,” by Rainer Maria Rilke and translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy. Rilke is one of Szymko’s favorite poets. Consequently, Szymko felt compelled to use his texts, which she noted are the strongest out of all the ones she

used. Its strength and longevity come from common themes of a search for meaning in life, a search for the divine in all people, and in this case, strength and resilience in the face of darkness.

Originally, she struggled with who was being addressed within the context of Alzheimer’s. After careful thought, Szymko decided the text should speak to the care-partner. She then set “In This Uncontainable Night” as a counterpart for number 6, “Sundowning.”31 “Sundowning” addresses the patient and uses a “broken clock” gesture, while “In This Uncontainable Night” addresses the care-partner and it contains a steady “bell” gesture. Szymko uses the word “misery” when describing the situations of both care partner and Alzheimer’s patient. Understandably, each character’s misery is very real, but is expressed quite differently. The Alzheimer’s patient is seen as very agitated in “Sundowning.” The care-partner is doleful and spent in, “In This Uncontainable Night.” As a result, Szymko uses the poetry for this movement as encouragement for the care-partner.

In lines 1 and 2, the care-partner is reminded of the journey traveled and how far they have come. Through something as simple as breathing, there is felt a sense of peace. The misery felt is compared with darkness in lines 3 and 4 and imagined as a bell tower. The care-partner is the bell, and should use the strong, vibrant sound to be heard in the darkness. The care-partner is encouraged to be flexible as situations change and to find both mystery and meaning through the darkness. The poetry ends encouraging the care-partner to find a voice and let the world know ‘I’m still here,’ still making sense of this experience.

31 Szymko, interview.
Regret

She refuses to get out of the Honda, 1
grabs the steering wheel from the passenger side
hangs on, knuckles white --
kicks at her daughter
waiting patiently by the open car door, 5
spits at the young aide assigned to help,
pinches the arm of the duty nurse reaching in.

On this bitterly cold morning in March
she hisses words never before out of her mouth
digs in her heels, stays put. 10

Understands in some corner of her brain
if she gets out of the car
and walks through the large double doors
she will never leave.32

“Regret” opens the third section of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey called, “I
and Thou.” This section combines ideas of both the patient and the care-partner. Ultimately, it
conveys the idea that the people experiencing Alzheimer's are not the disease. They are more
than that, they are spiritual beings with voices.33 The poem, “Regret” is by Sharon Lask Munson.
Her mother suffered with Alzheimer’s disease and this poem is based on her experience.

“Regret” recounts a story of an Alzheimer's patient being taken, to what is assumed, a
care facility. In the poetry, there is a noticeable pattern of three lines followed by four lines, and
then repeated. The poet is generous with action words describing the struggle to get out of the
car. Lines 2-3 use the verbs “grab” and “hangs.” Lines 4-7 contain even more violent verbs such
as “kicks,” “spits,” and “pinches,” as the situation escalates. Also notable is the fact that this
behavior is directed towards the patient’s daughter and other characters who are just trying to

33 Szymko, interview.
help. As a final show of stubborn will, lines 8-10 include the action words “hisses,” “digs,” and “stays.”

The poem makes it clear to the reader this is not the typical behavior of the mother. Lines 11-14 reveal the reason for the behavior. If the mother leaves the car and goes through the doors, she will never go back home. There is a sense of anger and betrayal on the part of the mother for trusting her daughter and leaving her at this unfamiliar place. However, just as interesting to imagine are the regret and guilt on the part of the daughter for leaving her mother in her final home.

Why Am I in This Place

You come to see me every day 1
(Why am I in this place?)
I sometimes can't recall your name
but I do recall the face.

I know you're someone who I love -- 5
my daughter, or maybe my mother.
And that man with you --
is that your husband or your brother?

Your husband? Are you old enough?
He seems very nice. 10
(Help me to remember --
Wasn't I married -- twice?)

Why am I here, and what did I do
to deserve this wretched end?
I'm surrounded by many strangers. 15
(Or maybe they're my friends?)

My room is cozy and comfortable --
I must admit it's nice.
But someone's stealing my underwear!
(Really! It's happened twice!) 20

They really treat me well here,
I'm as happy as can be.
(See that man in the red sweater?)
He wants to marry me.
Did I ever have a husband? 25
Did I ever have a home?
Did I have a family?
Or did I live alone?

Oh, I remember my husband now,
But I can't recall his face. 30
Where is he? Does he come to visit?
Did HE put me in this place?

You need to tell the attendant
this door is always locked.
I can't go out when I want to. 35
I've knocked and knocked and knocked.34

Szymko found the poetry for “Why Am I in This Place” on a Facebook listing in an Alzheimer's group. She was researching for text that was lighthearted or even comical, and the same time related to dementia. The post she chose came from Holle Albee titled, “My Mother's Alzheimer's.” Everything that made it into the poetry was what Albee’s mother did or said. With permission of the author, Szymko rearranged the text to “create a meaningful flow.” The story, told in poetry, is about an Alzheimer’s patient receiving a visit from her daughter and the conversation that ensues.

The first verse retells their initial greeting. The patient acknowledges that the daughter comes to see her every day, but she can't always remember her name. She goes on in lines 5 and 6 to admit her visitor is someone she loves, possibly her mother or daughter. By this admission, today must be a day where she can't remember her visitor.

In lines 7, 8, and 9 the Alzheimer's patient loses her train of thought and jumps to another series of questions. These lines are spoken in the movement. She enquires about the man with her daughter and when told he is her husband, she asks lightheartedly, “Are you old enough?”

34 Holle Albee, “My Mother’s Alzheimer’s,” Facebook October 22, 2015,
https://www.facebook.com/100000195962977/posts/1211227268893794/?d=n
The conversation continues but with no acknowledgment that the husband is present; “He seems very nice;” wasn’t I married — twice?”

In lines 13 through 15 the patient becomes abruptly aggravated. She insists on knowing why she is here and why there are so many strangers. After exclaiming that she does not deserve this treatment, she just as suddenly returns to her pleasant tone. The patient discloses her room is very comfortable and nice. She comically admits that someone is repeatedly stealing her underwear. This serves to enhance the humor.

Still confused, the patient asks in lines 25 through 28 if she ever had a home, husband, or family. Or perhaps, she ponders, she lived alone. Sadly, this means she doesn't remember who she is talking with, even though just moments ago she was introduced. From lines 29-32, the patient finally recalls her husband, but only vaguely. She wonders aloud if he was the one who put her in a care facility.

Still in a state of confusion, the patient speaks three of the last four lines. She asks her daughter to communicate to the attendant the need to unlock the doors to the outside. She explains that no one answers her repeated knocking.

**Remembering**

Do you know lonely? 1  
Sit strapped into a chair  
No choice, keep breathing

Do you know lonely?  
Words are spoke’ as if I'm not there 5  
Here inside I'm alive  
Still feeling beauty -- kind eyes, warm smile  
Please, please, please  
I'm still here inside.

Wonder if you see inside 10  
Lonely, lonely me remembering beauty.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{35}\) Szymko, 2015.
Szymko wrote the text to “Remembering.” She creates the scene of a person deep into Alzheimer’s who is craving human interaction. She remembers beautiful things but apparently no one will listen or share in her remembrances.

The beginning lines of the first two verses ask the question, “Do you know lonely?” It is an important question but is not answered directly in the poetry. The patient begins to share experiences. Lines 2-5 shows a person sadly without option. The quality of life is at the mercy of others. The imposed isolation further indicates no one even talks to the patient. Here it is inferred that most people do not know this kind of loneliness.

Yet, there is a soul still encapsulated in a body. Beauty is recognizable by “kind eyes” and “warm smiles.” Lines 8 and 9 are a plea for the patient to be seen. There is still the essence of the patient that evidently remains. Szymko remarks that, “this is where the sunshine comes out.” The patient can still sense kindness and beauty. The last question is posed in lines 10 and 11. Can anyone see through the loneliness to find the patient remembering beautiful things?

**Hold Hands**

“I'm going to give you 3 new words: 1
Be-here-now.”

You know you love me
but you can't recall my name
so, we just hold hands.

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36 Szymko, interview.
37 Szymko, 2015.
The first two lines of “Hold Hands” are Szymko’s final adaptation of the Mini-Mental State Exam. They are directed at caregiver and patient alike. The three-word instructions are simply to be present and enjoy each other.

The poetry for lines 3-5 is written by Forrest Hainline and comes from the anthology, *Forgetting Home, Poems About Alzheimer's*. Although there is a connection, there is no recognition of identity and so the two simply hold hands as symbols of presence one to another.

**I Sing to You**

I sing to you 1
songs you taught me when I was small
(songs from when you were small)
not knowing the words would someday hold
more meaning than we could ever imagine 5
I sing, I sing to you—

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine
You make me happy when skies are grey.
You'll never know dear how much I love you.
Please don't take my sunshine away.

The poetry in, “I Sing to You,” was written by Linda Austin and comes from her book of poetry titled, “Poems That Come to Mind.” Sadly, Austin’s mother was stricken with Alzheimer's. She began to write poetry, which would capture poignant memories found throughout her mother’s Alzheimer journey.

The second part of, “I Sing to You,” is the well-known song, “You Are My Sunshine.” Its author has been disputed for years, but Jimmy Davis and Charles Mitchell bought the copyright to this song in 1940.

Lines 1-3 recount the sharing of songs passed from generation to generation. The care-partner admits in lines 4-6 they never understood, back then, the significance of the words. She

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begins to sing a very familiar song, “You Are My Sunshine.” This song would have been very popular during the early years of the patient. Its meaning is surely not lost however on the younger care-partner who sings, “You’ll never know dear how much I love you. Please don’t take my sunshine away.” While contained within this movement as a familiar response, Szymko says it also functions as a segue into the next movement, “Love Bears All Things.”

**Love Bears All Things**

Love bears all things 1  
believes all things  
hopes all things  
endures all things  
love never fails.  

The last movement is from the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, specifically verse seven and part of eight. The Epistle is generally believed to be written by the Apostle Paul. Most of this chapter in the Epistle covers the subject of love. Szymko chose this verse and a half to offer hope and encouragement to those who have gone on this grueling journey.

Lines 1-4 state four different forms of love in action. Paul infers that love is not just a noun or a word that is spoken lightly, but it is shown in actions. Clearly noticeable in these four lines is the word “all,” which follows every verb. By using this determiner, Paul seems to be indicating not just some things are to be born, believed, hoped, and endured; everything is. This offers great hope and encouragement to the reader. Line 5 offers the most powerful and confident statement of all, “love never fails.” Notice these are the three strongest words of the verse, and they are placed together to create an unshakable truth.

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41 Szymko, interview.  
42 1 Corinthians 13:7-8, New King James Version.
Chapter 3. Musical Analysis

Szymko was originally commissioned to write a work that was 30 minutes in length for orchestra, choir, and soloists. When she finished, the work was around 70 minutes in length. Szymko’s completed project includes grand hymn settings, harmonically dissonant movements, a choral tango, an inserted folk tune, sweeping cinematic sections, and movements that hint at minimalism. Most of the works within her oeuvre are not lengthy pieces, and the movements which comprise *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* are no different.

One unique moment helped shape Szymko’s vision for the entire work. She had just come out of a rehearsal where she had also interviewed some people with Alzheimer’s. It was such a powerful moment for her, and she realized then that the message she was going to share had to be universal. As a result, there are three different soloists, as well as speaking parts that are heard throughout *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. However, there are no specific character names assigned to each of the soli or the speaking parts. Szymko felt that Alzheimer’s dementia is a disease that touches almost everyone in some way, and it is more personal for the listener to imagine the face of a loved-one as the soloist rather than have it defined. The chorus even plays character parts at times, rather than acting as a narrator, or simply making comments on the story. This concept is liberating and powerful for the audience.

The harmonic language in *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* is rooted in a sense of tonality, and there is often an aural feeling of a tonal center. However, it does not always follow a traditional function. Szymko does make use of key signature, which aids in giving the singer a point of reference when sight reading. In terms of tonality then, it is generally
not difficult for an experienced musician to read these movements. The tonal center is grounded in pedal tones, walking bass lines, and infrequent harmonic shifts. If she does change the tonal center for any length of time, she will usually change the key signature. She maintains a perceived stretch in tonality by the use of extended harmonies, large leaps of sevenths or more, tritones, and accidentals. Szymko almost always transitions from one movement to another, using the ending chord to become the tonic or the dominant of the new movement. She sometimes ends on a single pitch and uses that common pitch to segue between movements. Her experience with storytelling, programming concerts, and musical theater helped her create this feeling of an almost seamless story, which she facilitates through her choice of harmonic transitions from movement to movement. These transitional areas include same chord member transitions, single pitches ending a movement but signaling the upcoming key, third relationships, dominant/tonic relationships, and relative major/minor relationships.

However, *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* is a work dominated by melody over harmony. While all the movements are all through-composed and noticeably absent of repetitive choruses, melody is prominent in every movement. Szymko’s melodic shape, its relation to the text, and the emotional response she creates from the texture being used are central to her compositional technique. Her melodies are characterized as lyrical, intuitive, and text driven. Usually, the melodies are in the upper voice within the texture, or the melody is given to a solo line. When she wants to bring attention to the melody, all parts sing in unison, which creates a strength even when the dynamics are soft. When placed in the uppermost voice, the other voices maintain homorhythmic corroboration and harmonic support. When the melody

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45 Szymko, interview.
is found in a solo, the other voice parts often act as vocal accompaniment, providing harmonic underpinning and other rhythmic interest.

The use of tempo changes, meter changes, and syncopation, are prevalent throughout the work. Szymko’s dedication to the text and its natural flow is shown by deliberate and quick meter changes. Rapid metric shifts along with the use of syncopation, especially when consistently shown on offbeats, create a sense of freneticism, unsettled news, and even anger; all feelings expressed by patients of Alzheimer’s. Tempo markings that fluctuate swiftly and then return to a tempo, moments of silence, and fermatas are other common markings, which Szymko uses in her compositional approach. They are frequently seen, but specifically placed as expressive musical devices, which serve to strengthen the text. These constant subtle shifts in motion are hardly noticed by the listener on a cognitive level but are felt and understood on a much deeper emotional level. They serve to create an emotional depth and width that draw the listener and performer into the story.

There are clear motives that Szymko employs to tie Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey together. Movement 2, “The Tangled Tango,” incorporates syncopated motives and micro-motives that can be seen again in movements 4 and 7. These motives occur every time the Mini-Mental State Exam is given. The “love” motive can first be seen in movement 5. The Song of Solomon is the text for this movement. The motive can be found again in movement 14, “Hold Hands.” The author has named this the “Love Theme” because it is found in movements where love is the predominant theme. The “resolve” motive is first seen in movement 7, where it is at one point combined with the “tangled” motive. It is then seen again in movement 15, “I

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46 Szymko, interview.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
Sing to You.” The inability of the patient to cope with the disease is a weakness inferred by this slow, descending, dotted-eighth rhythmic pattern. The author designated this motive as “resolve” because it is a slow and steady rhythm which descends until near its end and then changes direction back up. It occurs in movements where strength is needed.

I Felt a Cleaving

The first movement begins with an orchestral introduction. From the onset, the eerie sounds emanating from the orchestra create an atmosphere of uncertainty. The tam-tam begins the movement quietly and alone for two and 1/2 measures. The clarinet and bass clarinet play a sinister half-step gesture, while the bass and cello begin an F pedal tone suggesting the key of F minor. The half-step gesture mentioned in measure 3 is a fragment of a larger melodic gesture seen in measure 11. This melodic gesture comprised of a half step followed by a minor third and two major thirds in the winds most certainly represents “confusion.” The author has selected this name because the pitches do not outline a chord or signal a key region. This gesture seems void of tonality. This gesture will be seen later in the movement representing the frustration and confusion felt in Alzheimer’s patients. The woodwinds enter at letter A at forte and crescendo to fortissimo followed a sudden release. The piccolo fluttering in measure eight also adds an otherworldly character.
Example 2.1. “Confusion” gesture in “I Felt a Cleaving,” m. 11

The choir enters at letter B and immediately, tonal ambiguity sets in as the inside voices literally begin to split in oblique motion away from the F still being sung by the sopranos and basses. In addition, the homorhythmic movement by all voices is placed on the “and” of every beat. This driving rhythmic structure confirms the feeling that something is not right. This same pattern occurs two more times, and descends a perfect fifth each time, as the volume for choir and orchestra increases.

Letter D confirms a shift to F-sharp minor while Szymko uses meter changes to support text. In this instance, the changes are purposefully leaving the listener with a sense of uneasiness. The first soloist of the work is introduced in this section. There is a lack of tonal tension, and the meter settles in a regular 4/4 pattern as the mezzo begins to tell her story. The use of harp and soft strings encourages a sense of calmness. However, serenity is fleeting; a 5/4 metric shift with key changes makes for an unsettled atmosphere. In fact, through most of this section the search for a tonal center is not fruitful. There are repeated vocal lines that outline an A-flat minor chord,
but they don’t lead anywhere concrete. This is the “confusion” gesture and throughout this section it is deployed effectively, disguising a true key feeling.

At measure 66 the “confusion” gesture makes its first appearance in 55 measures, first by the clarinet, then followed by soloist and the chorus. The chorus echoes the soloist’s melodic gesture in four different octaves and the tempo begins to unravel towards a dramatic F minor 11 chord at m. 71.
Example 2.2. “Confusion” gesture in “I Felt a Cleaving,” mm. 67-70

The same melodic sequence is picked up by the winds adding to the sense of panic. The “confusion” gesture is represented throughout the orchestra until m. 78. At this point, A minor is
re-established by the raised E-flat chord. Part of the soloist’s opening line heard in the woodwinds, reminds the listener of peace that was felt for a short time. A final A minor chord is played, in staccato fashion, on the first beat of the last measure. Szymko is signaling how swift and transient peace is by the sudden release.
Table 2.1. "I Felt a Cleaving" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-17</th>
<th>18-32</th>
<th>33-38</th>
<th>39-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-62</th>
<th>63-75</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>15 (5+5+5)</td>
<td>6 (2+4)</td>
<td>6 (3+3)</td>
<td>10 (4+6)</td>
<td>8 (4+4)</td>
<td>13 (6+7)</td>
<td>8 (2+2+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>F-sharp minor</td>
<td>F-sharp minor</td>
<td>F-sharp minor</td>
<td>F-sharp minor</td>
<td>A-flat minor</td>
<td>A-flat minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra only</td>
<td>SATB orchestra</td>
<td>SATB orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo and orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Solo orchestra SATB choir</td>
<td>Solo orchestra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>I felt a cleaving in my mind as if my brain had split.</td>
<td>I tried to match it seam by seam but could not make it fit.</td>
<td>I felt a cleaving in my mind as if my brain had split. I tried to match it seam by seam but could not make it fit.</td>
<td>I felt a cleaving in my mind as if my brain had split. I tried to match it seam by seam but could not make it fit.</td>
<td>I felt a cleaving in my mind as if my brain had split. I tried to match it seam by seam but could not make it fit.</td>
<td>The thought behind I strove to join into the thought before, but sequence raveled out of reach.</td>
<td>Like balls upon a floor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tangled Tango

Szymko ends the first movement of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey on an A minor chord and proceeds to start movement two in A minor. This technique helps provide continuity not only musically, but also in terms of keeping the libretto together. The opening of “Tangled Tango” uses, as one might expect, a piano and bass playing a syncopated rhythm typically associated with a Tango. The first statement from A to E falls on beat one, the and-of two, and the and-of four. The next statement falls on beat four, beat one of the following measure, and the “and” of two. This somewhat nontypical rhythmic pattern reinforces the surreal perspective from Alzheimer’s.

This lopsided rhythmic pattern happens three more times before a chord sounds above it. A form of the “confusion” gesture from movement one is presented as a chord rather than melodic material. Szymko continues the lopsided tango material in the bass at m. 27 with the noticeable exception that there are now measures of silence as the singer tries to remember the next letter she is asked to recall. The mounting awkward pressure on the soloist finally culminates with her half-hearted spoken “O?”

At letter A, Szymko switches from a quasi-recitative texture to a fully sung solo. The bass and cello, along with the piano, continue to present the syncopated tango figure, while a stylistically accurate alto saxophone is added to complete the orchestration.

The soloist performs the simple initial theme in measures 44 through 49. However, the intensity is increased in her repeated statement with the melody an octave higher in the second part. This move projects the growing fear inside the soloist who is learning she probably has Alzheimer’s. The abrupt entrance of the choir at letter B introduces new accompaniment material
in four-part octave. This material sounds like the sarcastic response of a bully. Thus, the author has named this the “bully” theme.

Example 2.3. “Bully” theme in “Tangled Tango,” m. 59-60

Measure 63 begins an orchestra interlude that moves back and forth from the key of A minor to its relative key of C major. These sudden harmonic shifts demonstrate the uneasiness of the soloist as a character who has Alzheimer's. There is confusion in her mind and her thoughts and decisions keep getting tangled up. At measure 74, the orchestra interjects the previous “bully” theme again in octaves at a fortissimo level.

At letter C, the soloist begins to sing again with the same melodic idea with which she began the movement. Her secondary lines ascend further as her fear increases. Measure 91 is a very poignant moment. Szymko has offset the soloist’s words on the “ands” of beats as if the soloist is sobbing and cannot quite catch a breath. Then, she blurts out her own “bully” interjection without the help of the choir.

Szymko adds two additional interjectional responses at letter D, one by the soloist and two by the choir as if trying to have the last word. The last time the choir responds with the “bully” theme, they move from four-part octaves as they have sung every time, to 6-part chords effectively becoming a slightly weaker taunt. At letter E there is a confirmation of a final return to A minor. The soloist returns to her simple theme she shared at the very beginning of the movement. Instead of going up an octave or more on the second phrase as she did at other times,
she goes down to a low A demonstrating her sadness and defeat. The syncopated tango rhythms heard in the bass and cello through much of the movement return here.

The piano has been silent since m. 127 but is saved to play the lowest E it is capable of on the last measure of the movement. This ending accomplishes two things. First, ending with descending pitches acknowledges how people with Alzheimer’s and their care partners are weighed down and burdened. Also, the ending, which ends on an E shows there is no clear resolution to A minor as one might want. Similarly, the Alzheimer’s journey itself never ends in the manner one might want.

Example 2.4. Ending of “Tangled Tango,” mm. 132-138
Table 2.2. "Tangled Tango" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-12 (4+4+4)</th>
<th>13-28 (4+4+4+4)</th>
<th>29-39 (4+1+2+1+2)</th>
<th>40-57 (4+4+4+4+2)</th>
<th>58-62 (3+2)</th>
<th>63-74 (3+4+5)</th>
<th>75-78 (2+2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Spoken text, string bass.</td>
<td>Spoken text, strings.</td>
<td>Spoken and sung dialogue. String bass.</td>
<td>Solo Orchestra</td>
<td>Solo Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>I am going to give you names of three objects: shoe, tree, car. Can you repeat those three words? Shh shoe… train…</td>
<td>I can’t remember the other one. Okay, then; Please repeat this phrase: ‘no ifs ands or buts.’ No… no ifs no, nothing fits. Okay, can you please spell the word ‘world’ backward?</td>
<td>“D” “D” “R” “O?” double-u</td>
<td>My world is backward, upside down and inside out. My world is backward, upside down and turned about.</td>
<td>No ifs ands or buts about it.</td>
<td>No ifs ands or buts about it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table cont’d.)
Table 2.2. "Tangled Tango" Herford Bar Analysis Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>79-93</th>
<th>94-95</th>
<th>96-108</th>
<th>109-116</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>(4+4+4+3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Moves between F major &amp; A minor</td>
<td>A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>First theme comes back. Each phrase grows higher.</td>
<td>“Bully” theme interjected by soloist</td>
<td>Second thematic material from mm. 63-74</td>
<td>“Bully” theme passed around from choir to solo and back to choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Solo Orchestra</td>
<td>Solo Orchestra</td>
<td>Solo Orchestra</td>
<td>Solo Orchestra Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>My words and thoughts get tangled deep inside my brain. I worry all the time about my lapses, and I feel ashamed</td>
<td>No ifs ands or buts about it.</td>
<td>Just the other day I lost my way on my way home. My heartbeat raced as panic swept into my very bones</td>
<td>No ifs ands or buts about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Memory Aids

The transition to “Memory Aids” from “Tangled Tango” is not nearly as smooth as the transition from “I Felt a Cleaving” to “Tangled Tango.” “Memory Aids” is in the key of B-flat major. The last note of the previous movement is E natural. A tritone is the interval used, and it is meant to signal that something is not right with the person recently diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.

In the first A section, Szymko uses extended forms of a B-flat chord to show movement. Beginning with a B-flat 9 chord for two measures, she expands to a B-flat 11 chord for two measures, and once more extension to a B-flat 13 chord before moving backwards in motion. The two measure phrases show a gradual crescendo and decrescendo. Rhythmically she deploys a constant eighth-note pattern in a 4/4 time signature. This pattern harmonically, dynamically, and rhythmically creates a gentle undulating feeling.

Example 2.5. Extended harmonies in “Memory Aids,” mm. 1-6

At letter A the mezzo-soprano sings, and the strings continue the undulating motion from the first eight bars. This allows the solo’s awkward recitation to come out of the texture. The soloist as a character is struggling with memory. She repeats phrases over and over to help her
remember what objects are, and what her tasks for the day include. The marimba is featured in this movement but ends up adding confusion rather than clarity. The interjections it executes are sudden and add to the anxious mood.

Example 2.6. Marimba adds confusion in “Memory Aids,” mm. 10-13

The most important thing for the mezzo’s character to remember is to call her daughter. Consequently, she repeats the instructions to herself three times but then later stumbles trying to remember who she is supposed to call.

At letter C the key region and time signature shift. It immediately becomes more animated and incorporates a large portion of the orchestra. This technique allows much more color and expression. When the soloist enters there is a palpable increase in energy bordering on frantic. She continues to stumble. The oscillation between 3/4 and 4/4 adds more to the instability and agitation of the soloist. The A section returns in m. 56. The extended harmonies play their undulating measures of 9th through 13th chords. It is significant that the soloist ends
by herself 3 beats into the final measure as if she is determined to have the final word on the matter.
Table 2.3. "Memory Aids" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-8</th>
<th>9-19</th>
<th>20-27</th>
<th>28-35</th>
<th>36-45</th>
<th>46-55</th>
<th>56-70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>8 (2+2+2+2)</td>
<td>11 (2+3+3+3)</td>
<td>8 (2+3+3)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10 (4+6)</td>
<td>10 (2+2+2+4)</td>
<td>15 (3+2+3+2+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>This is the paper that gives the date. This is the kettle that boils the water. This is a China breakfast plate. This is the note to call my daughter</td>
<td>This is the paper that gives the date. This is the kettle to boil the water. This is a China breakfast plate. This is a note, this is a note to call my daughter.</td>
<td>This is coffee, I drink it black. This is toast I eat it plain.</td>
<td>These are the thoughts I keep on track, to hurry them through my daughter's brain.</td>
<td>These are the things I need to say to sound as usual on the phone. The longer I keep my child at bay, the longer my life is still my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This Is What We Fear

This movement completes the first section, which has been written from the perspective of the person suffering with Alzheimer’s. Consequently, it serves as an introduction to the second section. “This Is What We Fear” launches with the syncopated Latin bass line from the “Tangled Tango.” A Mini-Mind Test is administered to the patient, but with a different response. What was once uncertain, has been confirmed. The mezzo’s character admits living with “shame,” “stigma,” and “fear.” From the syncopated Latin tango rhythms, the piece shifts course and Szymko introduces a ground bass figure that is repeated throughout the movement.

Example 2.7. Ground bass figure in “This Is What We Fear,” mm.18-22

The tenor section (or optional tenor solo) begins to sing new material above the ground bass. This theme largely encompasses the material sung by the choir for the rest of the movement.
The basses restate it again an octave below the tenors’ pitch. The altos and the sopranos enter later singing fragments of the theme. Here, the ground bass has been augmented by two measures to accommodate the additional voices. At letter B sopranos and tenors sing the theme while a crescendo occurs on the word “fear.” This is the climax of the first section.

Later, Szymko offers an orchestral iteration of the ground bass with thematic material above. By the last section, the orchestra has given up on the ground bass figure and has begun to play imitative fragments of the theme. This last section is homorhythmic and finds all voices singing the theme stressing the idea of loneliness.
Table 2.4. "This Is What We Fear" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-28</th>
<th>29-42</th>
<th>43-50</th>
<th>51-56</th>
<th>57-64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>28 (4+1+4+4+4+5+1+5)</td>
<td>14 (5+2+5+2)</td>
<td>8 (5+3)</td>
<td>6 (4+2)</td>
<td>8 (5+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Strings</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Those three words I gave you earlier; Can you recall them? Shame, stigma, fear. I'm afraid of becoming dependent of being a burden. I'm afraid of losing control; Of being out of control I'm afraid of being abandoned, a burden, pitied. I'm afraid of life without memories; Without meaning, I have reached a point where I know I don't know; I just don't know when I don't know; The living unknown frightens me more than death.</td>
<td>This is what we fear: no sight, no sound, no touch or taste or smell. Nothing to link with, nothing to love or link with.</td>
<td>This is what we fear: no sight, no sound, no touch or taste or smell. Nothing to link with, nothing to love or link with.</td>
<td>This is what we fear: no sight, no sound, no touch or taste or smell. Nothing to think with, nothing to love or link with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**By Night**

“By Night” contains the motive which Szymko conceived before she even began writing *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. This motive is heard through this piece often but returns later in movement 14 and is known as the “love” theme. It is referred to in this manner, because the two movements in which it is found have heavy love and relationship themes.

Example 2.9. Love theme in “By Night,” mm. 10-21

Szymko creates an orchestral transition within the opening bars from “This Is What We Fear” to “By Night” and easily moves through three key regions. The “love theme” is initially heard above a reoccurring E-flat, after the transition to A-flat major. However, at measure 17, the reoccurring note under the theme has become an A-flat signaling the complete acceptance of the new key.

The newly introduced soprano solo begins and initiates the second theme within this movement.
This new theme is sweeping in character. Szymko uses third relationships to negotiate harmonic progression in mm. 22-23 and in mm. 25-26. Melodically, Szymko moves toward the climax at measure 27 singing the word, “loveth.” The soprano “stumbles” as she sings, “I sought him but, I sought him but.” On the third attempt, she is finally able to conclude the phrase, “but I found him not.” There is another occurrence of the “love theme” by the orchestra before they launch into an interlude.

This orchestral interlude is a sweeping version of the soprano’s theme with all the myriad colors of an orchestral palette. The soprano finally takes the theme back, but as she finishes with, “I found him not,” the harmony moves deceptively to F minor, creating an ominous foreboding.
One more iteration of the “love” theme is heard before the end of the movement. It is transformed to a D minor region. The final D then becomes the transition note to the next movement.
Table 2.5. "By Night" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-10</th>
<th>11-21</th>
<th>22-33</th>
<th>34-37</th>
<th>38-51</th>
<th>52-61</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>10 (4+4+2)</td>
<td>11 (3+4+4)</td>
<td>12 (3+4+5)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14 (3+4+3+4)</td>
<td>10 (4+6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Transition from previous movement.</td>
<td>Introduction of the “love theme”</td>
<td>Introduction to “By Night” theme by soprano soloist.</td>
<td>Second half of “Love theme.”</td>
<td>Orchestra version of “By Night” theme with solo ending.</td>
<td>First half of “love theme.” Spoken text superimposed upon last six measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra solo</td>
<td>Orchestra solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Solo</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>By night on my bed, I sought him. I sought him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tonight, I just want to look into your eyes and see sixty beautiful years of my life looking back at me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sundowning

The tenor soloist is introduced in this movement. Szymko refers to what occurs in the piano during this movement as a “clock” figure. Even though the “clock” is consistent in its pitches or “chimes” consisting of G, D, B, and F-sharp, they are wildly off in terms of rhythm. These random rhythms suggest the clock is broken.

Example 2.11. Broken clock in “Sundowning,” mm. 1-6

The soloist, identified as the care-partner, is trying to get in sync with the clock. At measure 16, the care-partner, does begin to find his own rhythm settling, even though the clock is still not reliable in its rhythm.

The soprano soloist makes her entrance at letter A. The broken “clock” figure soon becomes augmented to accommodate phrase ending. At this point the clock figure is replaced with steady rhythms in the orchestra and it seems the care-partner and “clock” are in sync.

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together. However, there remains an ongoing struggle, which accompanies both patient and care-partner in an episode of Sundowning. Here, evidence of the struggle can be seen in the search for a tonal place of rest. By measure 54, the movement travels to its 5th key signature and that will not be its last key change.

The soprano’s last phrase: “Like a rescued starling, disconsolate and thrashing against its cardboard box” ushers in the orchestra interlude. The interlude is a musical representation of a bird trying to get out of the box in which it is trapped. It is frantic and unsettled, loud, and startling. The heavy use of flute recalls a bird cry, and the flutter tongue technique embodies an anxious bird calling to be released from its cage. The “clock” feeling that once was random and disjointed is now a driving rhythmic pattern.
That rhythmic persistence does not relax until letter H. Its consistent drive helps the listener sense the nervous energy during an episode of Sundowning. The text asserts there is a
“voice” within the patient that is reminding her of things to do and the chorus and soloists continue the list of things not to be forgotten. At letter G the tenor and soprano soloists come back to thicken the texture and create a natural crescendo.

As the patient rises to address the voices in her head, the movement reaches its climax. Full choir and soloists are singing homorhythmically and at a fortissimo dynamic level. The clock-like sixteenths that have been felt for 56 measures transforms into tolling bells, but bells that are not quite together. Instead, they are heard on beat one, the and-of one, the and-of two, and beat three. The tenor and soprano soloists take over the narrative and the soloists are offset to create a disjoined pair as they sing, “And you rise like bad clockwork. Like I have forgotten, like I don’t understand, like I never understand the living room drapes are engulfed in flame.” Immediately, the off-beat bells return in the orchestra, but quickly are supplanted by an augmented clock gesture. The “clock” has wound down.
Table 2.6. "Sundowning" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-24</th>
<th>25-42</th>
<th>43-61</th>
<th>62-72</th>
<th>73-84</th>
<th>85-95</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>24 (3+3+4+5+5+4)</td>
<td>18 (3+8+7)</td>
<td>19 (9+2+8)</td>
<td>11 (6+5)</td>
<td>12 (3+5+4)</td>
<td>11 (5+6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>G Major</td>
<td>A major D-flat major</td>
<td>E-flat major C major</td>
<td>E minor C-sharp minor</td>
<td>E major D-flat major</td>
<td>D-flat major B-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>“Clock” gesture is out of sync.</td>
<td>At D-flat key change “clock” is in sync with the care-partner.</td>
<td>“Clock” is consistent. Flutter tongue in flute recalls scared bird.</td>
<td>Tutti choir “Clock” gesture is relentless. Choir is in unison.</td>
<td>Tutti choir “Clock” gesture is relentless. Choir is in unison.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra Tenor solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Soprano solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Soprano solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir Soprano &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir Soprano &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>This white. That yellow. This blue. No matter what pill I crush into the applesauce, this blue bowl, to feed you and myself, one full night of sleep, one night without this wandering. That weeping. Without the long rattle of doors.</td>
<td>Each evening that same urge to slip this lumbering form, two step from its wreckage as from a robe dropped to the floor.</td>
<td>Each evening, the struggle to ditch the feeble disguise of body, this skin, this jerry-built cage of bones that holds you, like the rescued starling, disconsolate and thrashing against its cardboard box.</td>
<td>Each evening that blue persistence, that voice, telling you to keep an appointment, to catch the bus, to report to a job last 15 years ago.</td>
<td>to keep your word, to collect the debt, to make things square. Each evening the struggle to take off your coat, to sit, rest, lie back, to be still.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table cont’d.)
Table 2.6. "Sundowning" Herford Bar Analysis Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>96-109</th>
<th>110-119</th>
<th>120-132</th>
<th>133-138</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6+6+2)</td>
<td>(4+4+2)</td>
<td>(8+5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>E minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Solo takes back narrative. “Clock” is consistent.</td>
<td>Tenor solo and tenor/bass sing rhythmically out of sync with soprano solo and trebles in choir. Extreme agitation in orchestra.</td>
<td>“Clock” gesture is slower and less driving in orchestra. Solo lines are disjunct.</td>
<td>“Clock” gesture returns to its out of sync character. Clock winds down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenor solo</td>
<td>Orchestra / Soprano &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra / Soprano &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra / Soprano &amp; tenor soli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>to sleep one night without this broken clock that is you still chiming in this still blue hour of evening, telling you, you are late, overdue.</td>
<td>You are expected somewhere important hours ago. You are late you are overdue. Years. And you rise.</td>
<td>And you rise like bad clockwork. Like I have forgotten. Like I don't understand. Like I never understand the living room drapes are engulfed in flame. Like the whole damn house of mind is burning down around you.</td>
<td>And the walls are all swallowing their doors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Choice

Mini-Mind Test makes its third appearance as well as the familiar tango music associated with it. The three words spoken by the care-partner are “heartbreak, stress, and resilience.” The strings continue fragments of the tango theme as the choir sings in unison octaves in a quasi-recitative “or take a deep breath and just do what needs to be done.”

A new “resolve” motive is introduced here. When this motive is heard, feelings of strength and resolve are needed. It is first heard from the trebles, and then echoed from the bass and tenor who are singing the text, “Feel a new loneliness.”

Example 2.13. Resolve motive in “A Choice,” mm. 16-17

There is one more example of the “resolve” motive sung without any significant theme before Szymko combines ideas. Both the tango fragments and the “resolve” motive come together at letter C, with the “resolve” motive being heard three more times before the end of the movement. This whimsical motive returns in movement 15 signaling peace and strength.
Table 2.7. "A Choice" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-6</th>
<th>7-15</th>
<th>16-25</th>
<th>26-31</th>
<th>32-43</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9 (5+4)</td>
<td>10 (3+4+3)</td>
<td>6 (3+3)</td>
<td>12 (3+3+2+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>E minor</td>
<td>G mixolydian</td>
<td>G mixolydian</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Tango cue. Spoken text above.</td>
<td>Tango cue in orchestra. Choir in unison except “fall apart” text.</td>
<td>Introduction of the “resolve” theme.</td>
<td>Choir sings rhythmically showing solidarity.</td>
<td>Tango cue is heard beneath the “resolve” motive above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Choir Orchestra</td>
<td>Choir Orchestra</td>
<td>Choir Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>I'm going to give you three more words to remember: heartbreak stress resilience.</td>
<td>There are moments when you have a choice: fall apart or take a deep breath and just do what needs to be done.</td>
<td>Feel a new loneliness.</td>
<td>And a new strength, feel a new strength.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lead, Kindly Light

“Lead, Kindly Light” marks the middle of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. The text comes directly from a hymn by John Henry Newman. This movement’s strength originates from a structural point at which all characters are intersecting; the patient, and the care-partners. They stand and sing, “I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.” The movement’s independent structure allows it to stand on its own apart from other pieces in the larger work. Every musical force available is used during this movement, and they are used almost continually from mm18-57. This literal strength in numbers creates an aural strength fashioned to offer emotional support.

The opening bars deploy a melodic theme, which returns later in the movement. Szymko refers to it as a “call to witness” rather than a “call to arms.” The key signature could be C major or A minor, but there is nothing that points clearly to either of these keys. The three soloists open the movement, but soon the full chorus enters in a six-part split providing sonic support. When the initial plea guidance is heard, there is a recognizable E minor chord. However, there is no F-sharp, so Szymko is beginning the movement in E Phrygian mode.

Every time the plea to “lead” occurs three or four times, the sequences grow in intensity until reaching a forte or fortissimo. Harmonic footing is not easily found until these pleas appear. At measure 33 sure harmonic footing is found again and there is a gradual build up in intensity from singers and orchestra alike from mm. 33-38. At last, there is a C major chord heard at letter C and once again the path has been illuminated.

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50 Szymko, interview.
Example 2.14. Illumination in “Lead Kindly Light,” mm. 36-39

Szymko creates a rhapsodic section in which wind parts are playing lines that weave in and out of each other. Above this full orchestration is heard the “call to witness” fragments from the beginning of the movement, now sung by all soloists and choir.

Finally, the orchestra takes over and plays a 27-measure postscript, which finishes the movement. In measure 62 the key region has become B-flat, and from that time to the end, there is more harmonic clarity. There are finally much needed and consistent illumination fragments, which are shared between winds, strings, and brass. A firm confirmation of B-flat is heard in m. 71. There are two more iterations of the “distant scene” motive heard at the opening of the movement as a bookend gesture before ending on a E-flat major chord.
Table 2.8. "Lead Kindly Light" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-13</th>
<th>14-29</th>
<th>30-38</th>
<th>39-50</th>
<th>51-56</th>
<th>57-83</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>13 (4+3+2+4)</td>
<td>11 (6+1+4)</td>
<td>9 (3+2+2+2)</td>
<td>12 (2+3+3+2+2)</td>
<td>6 (2+2+2)</td>
<td>27 (4+4+2+4+3+3+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>G mixolydian</td>
<td>E phrygian</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>G mixolydian</td>
<td>B-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Trumpet solo</td>
<td>Soli begins, choir joins with 6-part homophony.</td>
<td>Starts as thin choral texture but grows to include all parts and soli.</td>
<td>Big &amp; grand. Choir sings in 6-parts. Homophonic.</td>
<td>Orchestration is Rhapsodic in sound and texture.</td>
<td>Big orchestra sounds. Expressive. Trumpet solo returns near the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir Soprano, mezzo, &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir Soprano, mezzo, &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir Soprano, mezzo, &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir Soprano, mezzo, &amp; tenor soli</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Lead kindly Light, amidst the encircling gloom.</td>
<td>Lead Thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home.</td>
<td>Lead Thou me on! Keep Thou my feet.</td>
<td>I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Take Me Home

The shortest movement in *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey* is “Take Me Home.” It is only 12 measures and is a cappella. It stays in the key of G minor from beginning to end and there are no cadential points as the small movement is full of melodic fragments repeated over and over. The movement almost sounds aleatoric, although Szymko has left nothing to chance and has placed all the fragments in specific places. The movement includes the mezzo soloist and three-part treble voices, which can be sung as three additional soli to the larger work, or as 3 sections of treble voices from the choir.

Each voice part represents an embodiment of a character. Szymko is very specific regarding how each character is to be portrayed.\(^5\) The mezzo character’s response is very sad and miserable. The soprano section or soloist sings as if they were a nervous child. The alto 1 soloist or section should sing as if grief-stricken and cheerless. On the opposite end of the emotional spectrum is the alto 2 who sings in a very angry and combative manner as if she knows exactly what is happening and she is resisting.

Table 2.9. "Take Me Home" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-5</th>
<th>7-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Sounds like random voices. Sad and angry.</td>
<td>Sounds like random voices. Sad and angry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Soprano, Alto 1, Alto 2 &amp; Mezzo Soprano soli.</td>
<td>Soprano, Alto 1, Alto 2 &amp; Mezzo Soprano soli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Are we going home? Are we going home now? Take me home! I wanna go home! When are we going home?</td>
<td>Are we going home? Are we going home now? Take me home! I wanna go home! When are we going home?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) Szymko, interview.
**In This Uncontainable Night**

The last movement of Part 2 is also the longest movement of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. Szymko considers this to be the counterpart to No. 6 “Sundowning.” In “Sundowning,” the constant gesture heard is the clock. In “In This Uncontainable Night” the clock is replaced by a bell. From the onset of this movement, the tubular bells are heard. They move back and forth from F to G. With the help of a harp, piano, and glockenspiel, the listener can even imagine much larger bells. These pitches are sounding on top of each other so there is a striking half-step dissonance through the first ten measures. This sound does not dissipate quickly and will make dramatic reoccurrences.

![Example 2.15. Bell gestures “In This Uncontainable Night,” mm. 1-11](image)

The bell gesture soon fades and is substituted with an undulating series of eighth notes created by clarinets. These notes create a backdrop for a new 4 measure theme first appearing in the English horn, then the flutes and finally is passed to the clarinets and violins before returning to the English horn.

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52 Szymko, interview.
A bell gesture appears one more time before the choir enters and begins to sing their own material. The harp and piano continue to display bell gestures though they are much more subtle than the opening material. The bell gesture becomes accented, much stronger, and more pronounced in the piano part. The tubular bells offer their sounds, and their tonalities are blurred as they are asked to continue to vibrate. The text sung by the altos and basses reinforces this notion of bell gestures with the text, “Let this darkness be a bell tower and you the bell. As you ring, what batters you becomes your strength. The key regions change swiftly at letter C, and remind the listener, “move back and forth into the change.”

The accented bell gesture begins to wind down in strength and intensity in preparation for the new material. At letter E Szymko composes an intimate section of this movement unrelated to the bell gesture, during which the choir asks the question, “What is it like, such intensity of pain?” However, the bell gesture quickly returns providing a backdrop to the choir.

Szymko provides one more escape from the persistent bells and returns to a personal, intimate plea sung a cappella and in as many as 8 parts. The particularly dissonant chord on the
The word “hear” reminds the listener that people with Alzheimer’s and their car-partners have to sometimes be abrasive to be heard.

The last fourteen measures increase in intensity, energy, and dynamics. The listener is overcome with the powerful realization that this cruel disease has not completely decimated the caregiver; they are strong and present.
Table 2.10. "In This Uncontainable Night" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-10</th>
<th>11-30</th>
<th>31-47</th>
<th>48-69</th>
<th>70-79</th>
<th>80-101</th>
<th>102-123</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>10 (8+2)</td>
<td>20 (4+4+4+4+4)</td>
<td>17 (4+7+6)</td>
<td>22 (9+7+3+3)</td>
<td>10 (3+3+4)</td>
<td>22 (3+2+4+4+5+4)</td>
<td>22 (5+7+5+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>D-flat major</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>D major C major F major</td>
<td>D major C major</td>
<td>A minor A major</td>
<td>G major A major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Tubular bells are heard moving back and forth from F to G.</td>
<td>Clarinets provide an undulating series of eighth notes. Theme is heard in English horn.</td>
<td>Harp and piano display their own bell gesture.</td>
<td>Bell gestures are accented and quite strong.</td>
<td>Bell gestures wind down in intensity.</td>
<td>7/8 and soft orchestration allows for clear declamation. Choir is singing in parts. Bell gesture return.</td>
<td>Bell gesture continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Quiet friend who has come so far, feel how your breathing makes more space around you.</td>
<td>let this darkness be a bell tower &amp; you the bell. As you ring, what batters you becomes your strength. Move back &amp; forth into the change.</td>
<td>What is it like, such intensity of pain? If the drink is bitter, turn yourself into wine.</td>
<td>In this uncontainable night, be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses, the meaning discovered there.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.10. "In This Uncontainable Night" Herford Bar Analysis Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>124-136</th>
<th>137-158</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>13 (5+4+4)</td>
<td>22 (2+4+2+4+3+3+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>A minor, F major, E major, D major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Short a cappella section followed by theme in English horn from earlier.</td>
<td>The full orchestra is entirely fixated on playing some part of the bell gesture. Fortissimo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
<td>Orchestra Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>And if the world has ceased to hear you,</td>
<td>Say to the silent earth: I flow. To the rushing water speak: I am.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regret

“Regret” begins the third and final large section of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey. The tenor soloist opens this movement. His legato and sustained solo contains an ascending pattern on the words, “hangs on” that will return several times in the movement.

Example 2.17. Tenor ascending pattern “Regret,” mm. 7-11

He sings these increasingly higher intervals for significant amounts of time until the arrival at letter A.

At this point the tempo increases dramatically with an agitated and repetitive cello part propelling the motion forward. The percussive effects from the strings to the snare drums and marimba foretell the tense character of the piece due to the patient’s belligerent attitude. The strings share this percussive triplet pattern between themselves. The tenor soloist begins to sing his ascending “hangs on” pattern while the choir is singing very rhythmic and accented text, “spits at the young aide assigned to help, pinches the arm of the duty nurse reaching in.”

The tenor ultimately reaches a high A at the same time the chorus begins to sing a list of harsh physical reactions from the patient being admitted to a car facility. “Kicks” and “spits” are seen as quarter notes, while “pinches” is sung as a quarter-eighth triplet, and “hisses” is an acidic
sixteenth followed by a dotted eighth. These melodic and rhythmic groupings are written in such a way that they seem random and frantic, depicting the stubborn resistance of the patient.

As the tenor sings his third and final ascent to high A, the orchestration grows. The full orchestra and solo crescendo to fortissimo while the entire choir sings “hold on” followed by a 2/4 measure of deafening silence. The struggle between patient and care-partner has been difficult and time is needed to process.

At this point, the driving triplet pattern is gone from all parts and a new section, completely different commences. Devoted to processing the previous events, its G 9 chord offers some much-needed tranquility. At letter D the choir enters on octave D’s. Their parts begin to move in contrary motion and become more dissonant as memories of the previous events return. The last words sung by the tenor deliver the hopeless awareness, “if she gets out of the car and walks through the large double doors, she will never leave.”
Again, Szymko composes an orchestral conclusion to end a movement. The gravitas is palpable during this section until an arrival in C major. Sadly, the relief from regret is not long-lived. The next four measures harken to the sinister sounds from the first movement, “I Felt a Cleaving,” or movement ten, “In This Uncontainable Night” with their use of sudden and jarring intervals of a second. In this case, the C major chord is aggressively interrupted by the sharp interjection of a D-flat and a B-flat yielding an ominous ending to the movement.
### Table 2.11. "Regret" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-11</th>
<th>12-27</th>
<th>28-37</th>
<th>38-40</th>
<th>41-58</th>
<th>59-70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>11 (3+3+5)</td>
<td>16 (3+3+3+2+3+2)</td>
<td>10 (4+4+2)</td>
<td>3 (1+2)</td>
<td>18 (4+3+1+2+2+4+2)</td>
<td>12 (2+2+2+2+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Tenor solo Orchestra</td>
<td>Choir Orchestra</td>
<td>Tenor solo Choir Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Choir Orchestra Tenor solo</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>She refuses to get out of the Honda, grabs the steering wheel from the passenger side, hangs on.</td>
<td>Hangs on, knuckles white kicks at her daughter waiting patiently why they open car door, spits at the young aid assigned to Help, pinches the arm of the duty nurse reaching in</td>
<td>Kicks, spits, pinches, hisses, hangs on.</td>
<td>on this bitterly cold morning in March, she hisses words never before out of her mouth, digs in her heels, stays put. Understands in some corner of her brain if she gets out of the car and walks through the large double doors, she will never leave.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Am I in This Place

Movement 12 finally adds a bit of quirky levity to what has been an intense work thus far. Szymko sets this movement for the mezzo soloist as if she is having a conversation with her car-partner. It launches in C major with a 7/8-time signature through much of the piece. The low strings and the second bassoon accent the strong beats while the clarinet parts fall on the off beats. The oboes and English horn introduce fragments of the coming solo line.

Beginning at measure 5, there are 7/8 measures followed by measures of 4/4. The 7/8 represents the happy, articulate side of the patient, while the 12/8 or 6/8 represents the agitated, and confused portion. At this point, the patient still has moments of clarity. Much of the 7/8 includes a robust marimba part, which adds to the comical mood. It is not normally heard when the soloist is singing, it acts like a response to the solo. This ensures there will not be distraction away from the voice. Tonality shifts in this area from C major to F major and back again, but never far away from C major.

After the mezzo begins the movement, there is spoken dialogue in which the patient questions who is with her visitor and if he is old enough to be the visitor’s husband. This comedic moment leads into a return to 7/8 measures in which the patient decidedly approves of the visitor’s husband. Continuing the conversation, the confused patient reflects, “Help me to remember, wasn't I married twice?”

Confusion and anger seem to take over the patient in the following section. The 7/8 bar is replaced by a 12/8 bar and the added snare drum give this section a more defiant character. The tonality also shifts to minor creating a slightly darker color. These mood shifts do not last long as is quickly evident. The patient returns to her happy go lucky attitude and the meter continues to shift from 7/8 to 4/4. This section is very similar to letter A regarding tone and scene. The
marimba takes up the full rhythmic accompaniment and switches places with the oboe. However, the patient again quickly returns to an aggressive attitude as she makes the claim, “someone’s stealing my underwear!” This pseudo comedic section continues as she admits it's happened twice.

The patient continues to shift her mood from placid to irritated through the rest of the movement. There is an area when the patient admits her care is very good, and she's quite happy. Then, the patient fixates on her husband. She questions why she can't recall his face, and she also asks if he comes to visit. This leads to her most angry question, “Did HE put me in this place?”

The anger she experiences propels her into her next defiant, belligerent section, almost identical to letter B. When the patient admits that the strangers who surround her could be her friends, she relaxes and becomes calm again. At measure 112, the marimba makes its last return signaling the end of the soloist. It plays a robust part until the end of the movement, helping to maintain a quirky comical sound.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-19</th>
<th>20-34</th>
<th>35-42</th>
<th>43-55</th>
<th>56-78</th>
<th>79-99</th>
<th>100-123</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4+4+5+4+2)</td>
<td>(3+3+5+4)</td>
<td>(2+2+2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2+3+3+3)</td>
<td>(4+4+3+2+4+3)</td>
<td>(1+3+4+4+2+3+4)</td>
<td>(2+4+4+2+4+2+4+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>A minor, E minor</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>A minor, C major, F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
<td>Orchestra Mezzo solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>You come to see me every day (Why am I in this place?! I sometimes can't recall your name, but I do recall the face. I know you are someone who I love, my daughter or maybe my mother.</td>
<td>And that man with you - is that your husband or your brother? Your husband? Are you old enough? He seems very nice. Help me to remember wasn't I married twice?</td>
<td>Why am I here &amp; what did I do to deserve this wretched end?! I'm surrounded by many strangers- (or maybe they're my friends?)</td>
<td>My room is cozy and comfortable I must admit it's nice. but someone's stealing my underwear! Really, it's happened twice!</td>
<td>They really treat me well here, I'm as happy as can be. (See that man in the red sweater? He wants to marry me.) Did I ever have a husband? Did I ever have a home? Did I have a family? Or did I live alone?</td>
<td>oh, I remember my husband now, but I can't recall his face. Does he come to visit? Did he put me in this place?</td>
<td>Why am I here &amp; what did I do to deserve this wretched end?! I'm surrounded by many strangers, (or maybe they're my friends?) You need to tell the attendant the door is always locked. I can't go out when I want to. I've knocked &amp; knocked &amp; knocked.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remembering

Movement 13 of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey* is written for treble voices and orchestra. The flute plays a six-measure introduction with melodic fragments from the soprano line. The treble voices enter in measure in unison. The slender orchestration consisting of viola and cello offer minor support to the voices above. It is here, Szymko uses strategically placed rests to highlight the importance of the text. After the word, “lonely” there is a rest. After the word “sit” and before “strapped” there is a rest. After the word “chair” and after the word “choice” there are also rests. Here, Szymko adds a fermata on the word “breathing” as well as the rest right after it. This reminds the listener of the importance and impulse surrounding breath. She adds importance to the words, “No choice” by shifting from unison to parts. There is a similar construction to the next line as Szymko moves from unison to parts on the words, “here inside.” There is clear weight and gravitas to the scene that is set.

Example 2.20. Importance of rests in “Remembering,” mm. 7-12
At letter A the treble voices open into three parts undergirded by a lone C playing in the viola. However, the pleas written in the text do not interfere with the harmonic intimacy of the parts. The choral harmony reveals beauty rather than the expected irritating dissonance. This is heard in the soprano line.

Example 2.21. Theme in “Remembering,” mm. 18-27

This entire homorhythmic section is concluded at measure 26 resting on a V chord. The alto and soprano sing the second theme followed by a rest, as if sighing into the text, “remembering beauty.”

Example 2.22. Second theme in “Remembering,” mm. 24-28

That is the last sound heard from the voices until the end of the movement.

At letter B, the full string compliment finally plays, but at a reduced dynamic level revealing the need for more color before the winds are added. The first flute brings that to
fruition with the return of the first theme. The reappearance of the second theme materializes next. After two measures it is heard again in the flute and the second violin, followed by the choir's final word “remembering.” The “ng” is the last sound heard from the choir. This modified ending reminds the listener that eventually the mind may not even remember beauty.
### Table 2.13. "Remembering" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-16 (5+5+6)</th>
<th>17-33 (5+6+6)</th>
<th>34-42 (4+5)</th>
<th>43-48 (2+4)</th>
<th>49-55 (4+3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Very sparse accompaniment. Hollow sounding.</td>
<td>3-part choral writing above a viola or unaccompanied.</td>
<td>Full orchestra plays <em>pp</em> &lt; <em>f</em>.</td>
<td>Horns appear out of the orchestra texture. Climax of piece.</td>
<td>Solo flute. Choral parts end on a half-step that is unresolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Treble choir Flute, viola, and cello.</td>
<td>Treble choir Sparse strings.</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Treble choir Solo flute Violin 1 &amp; 2 Clarinet 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Do you know lonely? Sit strapped into a chair no choice, keep breathing. Do you know lonely? Words are spoke as if I'm not there; Here inside I'm alive.</td>
<td>Still, feeling beauty; kind eyes, warm smile. Please, please, please, I'm still here inside wonder if you see inside lonely, lonely me remembering beauty.</td>
<td>Remembering.</td>
<td>Remembering.</td>
<td>Remembering.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hold Hands

The A-flat held over from the second violin becomes a pivot note to the next piece and key. The “love” theme reoccurs in the flute parts from movement 5 after a long absence. The two movements are joined by this theme because of their similar textual theme.

Example 2.23. “Love” theme in “Hold Hands,” mm. 3-6

The viola provides the harmonic underpinning of the chorus with a sustained A-flat. The chorus begins to sing at letter A with the tenor and bass voices depicting the caregiver. The homorhythmic choir parts at m. 16 symbolize stability and security as the caregiver and the patient hold hands.

At measure 23, the cello begins a lilting rocking gesture that will soon be repeated with inside voices. At letter B, the Altos begin singing the rocking gesture before the tenors enter and sing the same pitches and rhythms. This gesture continues throughout most of the song until measure 44.
Example 2.24. Rocking gesture in “Hold Hands,” mm. 34-41

During this time, the bass and sopranos are providing harmonic underpinning while they sing the word “hold.” Basses sing for four measures before they take a breath and return to the texture, while sopranos rearticulate every two measures.

At the conclusion, the trumpet one plays a descant above the strings and chorus. This includes fragments from the trumpet part in movement 8, “Lead, Kindly Light.” Its gentle strength provides reassurance and resolve while the characters are holding hands.

Table 2.14. "Hold Hands" Herford Bar Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-9</th>
<th>10-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>9 (2+4+3)</td>
<td>20 (6+4+4+4+2)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14 (4+4+3+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Characteristics</td>
<td>Orchestral segue from “Remembering.” “Love” theme returns.</td>
<td>Homophony in choral parts. Extends to 8 parts.</td>
<td>Alto &amp; tenor sing the same rocking gesture.</td>
<td>Bass 2 &amp; tenor 2 lines are added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra Spoken text</td>
<td>Choir Viola &amp; cello</td>
<td>Choir Strings Trumpet</td>
<td>Choir Strings Trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>I'm going to give you 3 new words: be here now</td>
<td>You know you love me, but you can't recall my name. So, we just hold hands.</td>
<td>Hold.</td>
<td>Hold hands.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I Sing to You

The introduction to “I Sing to You” begins on a C minor chord and contains the first iteration of the “resolve” motive since movement 7, “A Choice.” It is briefly heard twice more during the introduction.

Example 2.25. Resolve motive in “I Sing to You,” mm. 1-11

When the choir begins to sing, the listener hears music sounding from the 1930’s or 1940’s reminiscent of when the Alzheimer's patient was young. Szymko followed the chord progression of “You Are My Sunshine” with added chromaticism, easy resolutions, and romantic dynamic contrasts. The text, “I sing to you songs you taught me when I was small,” ushers the listener to memories from their own childhood. The songs and the sound from that era would be what the patient would remember the clearest, and now the care-partner is singing those songs to the patient. Szymko’s recreates a big band, or barbershop sound that is easily recognizable.

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53 Szymko, interview.
Example 2.26. Early mid-20th Century Choral sound in “I Sing to You,” mm. 12-18

The “I sing to you” phrase from m. 13-15, is employed near the end. However, after the choir sings the second iteration, the text then changes to “I sing with you.” This is followed by a grand pause preparing the listener for what is to come. At measure 34 Szymko inserts the song “You Are My Sunshine,” a song very familiar to most generations from its composition to the present. The choir is asked to sing it in unison, simply, with a “gentle warmth.” Szymko then uses fragments of the melody to provide connective tissue from the folk song to the next movement. There is a grand pause leading into the final movement *attacca* in the key of F major.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-12</th>
<th>13-33</th>
<th>34-46</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>12 (4+3+5)</td>
<td>21 (2+4+6+3+3+3)</td>
<td>17 (5+3+2+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Area</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>Choir Piano, violin 2 and viola.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>I sing to you, I sing to you, songs you taught me when I was small not knowing the words would someday hold more meaning, than we could ever imagine. I sing to you,</td>
<td>I sing with you, you are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are Gray. You'll never know dear; how much I love you; Please don't take my sunshine away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Love Bears All Things

The final movement of *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey* begins in the key of F major with the piano offering a six-tuple pattern at measure one that does not end until the movement itself ends.

Example 2.27. Continuous piano gesture in “Love Bears All Things,” mm. 1-3

At measure 2, the harp and bass clarinet, along with the cello, reveal the five-measure theme of this movement. Once the theme has finished being stated by the orchestra, the choir begins to sing it in unison.
Example 2.28. First theme in “Love Bears All Things,” mm. 2-6
Up to this point, the choir has never completed the text from the Bible. The scripture says, “love ‘bears,’ ‘believes,’ ‘hopes,’ and ‘endures’ all things.” Finally, the choir finishes the text declamation saying, “love never fails,” and there is found a perfect authentic F major cadence. Here, Szymko composes an orchestral interlude and inserts the first thematic idea from “In the Uncontainable Night.”

Example 2.29. Motive from Movement 10 in “Love Bears All Things,” mm. 24-29

At letter C the soloists return and sing with the choir a very declamatory, homophonic section hovering around B flat. During this time the piano continues to play its “never-ending” love gesture, while the orchestra rests. Singing higher than the choir, the soprano soloist emerges from the texture.

Here, there is a reoccurrence of the original text with the choir singing in unison. This move returns to the A section. The cello has also taken up playing the original theme with the
chorus, while the other string parts provide their harmonic underpinning. They crescendo to the downbeat of measure 52, providing a clear perfect authentic cadence in F major.

Finally, in measure 57, the listener receives the final textual confirmation on which they have been waiting, “love never fails.” The piano continues its simple repetitive gesture. The soprano and tenor soloists sing the word “never” not on a strong beat, as if this is a last gasp. Measure 65 states one last “never” from all the chorus and the soloists and this last act is also not on strong a beat. There is no ritard at the end, the piano abruptly stops on a C while all the voices sing the word “fails.” The long, arduous journey is finished, and love of those near has prevailed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1-6</th>
<th>7-21</th>
<th>22-30</th>
<th>31-42</th>
<th>43-61</th>
<th>62-70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Measures</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15 (5+4+6)</td>
<td>9 (1+4+4)</td>
<td>12 (3+4+3+2)</td>
<td>19 (5+4+9)</td>
<td>9 (2+1+3+1+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tonal Area</strong></td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Events Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Constant piano figure throughout the piece. Bass clarinet introduces theme.</td>
<td>Choir sings theme in unison, then presents thematic material in parts.</td>
<td>Orchestral interlude</td>
<td>Added soli. Orchestra stops playing, piano continues its figure.</td>
<td>Cello takes theme. Choir states theme in unison then, restates in parts.</td>
<td>Thin string sound while piano continues figure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.16. "Love Bears All Things" Herford Bar Analysis
Chapter 4. Performance Guide for the Conductor

The following chapter is intended as a practical guide, which provides suggested considerations for the preparation, rehearsal, and performance of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. It is the author's intention to provide guidelines and considerations to aid in yielding an effective production. The author acknowledges there is an artistic subjectivity that occurs in the production of any musical work and that the performance arts are by nature personal expressions of both creator and to some extent, re-creator. Therefore, the author acknowledges the guidelines and considerations listed below are the result of the author’s score study and informed suggestions, as well as the opinions of two conductors who have performed Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. To lend other possibilities to the already rich libretto, possible staging options will be noted.

Considerations of Rhythm

During the author’s second conversation with Szymko she admitted, “rhythm is like my thing… rhythm and line. That’s me. Those are my focal points. Why I’m so precise about time, [is] because I believe that time and tempo are underrepresented expressive element[s] in music.”54 The rhythms Szymko employs in Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey are exceptionally diverse and intentionally fashioned. It is evident that great care is taken to present the chosen texts.

Szymko did months of research choosing texts for Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. The majority of the movements are experiences or stories from patients or care-

54 Szymko, interview.
partners. She believes when performed, the words should flow naturally, almost as if they are being spoken. Subsequently, Szymko worked to ensure that the rhythms are driven by the text and do not seem contrived. What resulted are sections that sound to the listener as quasi-recitative. However, after examination of the score, it is obvious she left nothing to chance by the choir or soloists. The texts in these instances have carefully notated rhythms, which are challenging, but always present the appropriate word stress. An example of this in a solo is seen in No. 6, “Sundowning.”

The tenor solo is describing his preparation of medicines to try and ensure a full night of sleep. The accompaniment is a broken clock figure, which three notes are never consecutively presented the same. This alone makes it challenging for the orchestra and conductor. The addition of the solo increases the difficulty for the ensemble. There are strategically placed rests between the colors of pills. The next phrase has almost no rests. Szymko uses the placement of rests as a compositional device allowing the rhythm to sound speech-like. However, it must be carefully rehearsed so that all parts of the ensemble are independent but functioning as one.

Example 2.30. Use of rests to highlight speech in “Sundowning,” mm. 8-13

A choral example of rhythms, which sound similar to a pattern of speech, is found in the opening bars 7-14 of “A Choice.” The sparse support from the orchestra is unrelated material taken from the “Tangled Tango.” The exposed choral parts at quarter note equals fifty-two will have to be rehearsed to ensure precision. However, Szymko encourages conductors to make sure
the product sounds like speech and not mechanical. She has even written an audible breath and
exhalation in m. 13 to ensure it sounds like a tired voice.

Example 2.31 Audible exhalation in “A Choice” m. 13

Perhaps the most difficult rhythmic movement for voice is No. 9, “Take Me Home.” The
author believes in large part this is due to its construction. Szymko recorded herself singing these
fragments, then layered the tracks on top of each other. What resulted is what is seen on the
page. These rhythmic outcries are literally crafted from Szymko’s voice. She commented
regarding this process, “I just felt the timing of it felt so right to me. I didn't want to try to stuff it
into something, so I just transcribed it as I sang it.”

Thus, the rhythms are rarely seen on the
same beat with the same rhythmic configuration. The words remain distinctive to their voice
part. Consequently, this movement will require much rehearsal time to guarantee rhythmic
integrity while maintaining its woeful character.

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55 Szymko. Interview.
In a conversation with Dr. Sperry, the author discussed teaching the multifarious rhythmic challenges within *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. His suggestion was to use a method now in music education he termed, “sound before sight.” He asserts that trained musicians tend to have a “brainy” approach to teaching and learning difficult rhythms. As a result, the phrases have very little natural flow, which is needed to make this work effective.

There is tendency when we see multimeter to really ‘brain’ apart the rhythms, and then you don’t get the flow of the English. So, this is a thing in music education that we are teaching a lot now, sound before sight. If you listen to a recording of a really good choir singing it without the music in front of you first, you absorb a lot of the sound and the ethos. I think Joan’s piece would benefit a lot from like a good recording, or even like Joan demonstrates it so beautifully when she comes into rehearsal.

This approach would benefit the singers early in the rehearsal schedule before the natural flow of the music was lost.

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56 Ethan Sperry, interview by author, Baton Rouge, January 27, 2022
57 Ethan Sperry, interview.
Considerations of Tempo

Due to Szymko’s meticulous attention to textual detail, there are numerous tempo markings and meter changes within Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. One example of her thoroughness towards tempo is found in No. 11, “Regret.” The author counted 42 examples of changes pertaining to tempi, including metronome markings, time signatures, *fermati*, and written directives. At a production time of around 70 minutes, this amount of detail will require considerable preparation on the part of the conductor. Time will need to be built into the schedule before beginning rehearsals to do complete score study and design rehearsal strategies.

Discussions with Szymko have proven her insistence that these tempo markings be observed. “I am a control freak,” she admitted. “When it comes to my music, I hear it. When you compose it you hear it a certain way. I know there are composers who are like, ‘Oh yeah, sure. Oh no, yeah.’ I’m not that person. I have so many tempo markings in there because I mean it.”58 The author’s conversations with Diane Retallack and Ethan Sperry have confirmed this to be true within a collegial atmosphere. With such care given towards tempi by the composer, great attention should be given by the conductor to honor her work.

Considerations of Ensemble

The size of a choral ensemble is always an important consideration when selecting music. It is especially important when considering performances of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey. The emotional weight, vocal stamina, moderate divisi, and length of the work suggests this is not appropriate for a chamber ensemble. The Eugene Concert Choir who commissioned the work had 41 singers. Retallack suggests that 40-65 singers would be optimal.59 At this

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58 Szymko, interview.
59 Retallack, interview.
number, the divisi in an eight-part split would be around 5-8, which will assist in balance and intonation. The author suggests the upper end of Retallack’s range would work best to balance choir against orchestra but still provide rhythmic clarity.

Szymko varies the role of the chorus throughout *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. Sometimes the role is that of a character, patient, or care-partner. Other times, the role shifts to be supportive to the soli. A third role it plays is one in dialogue with a solo. The choir must always be aware of the role they play in the context of the larger work. The supportive roles are no less important to establishing a mood or driving a rhythmic passage. However, they should always be aware of who is carrying the melody or who is presenting a new melodic or textual idea so they can let that solo or section be predominant in the texture.

There are three major soli in *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*. The solos vary in length and voice type, but all require a great range of color and expression contingent on the character and context. The table below serves as a reference tool in discerning the needs for each solo.

Table 2.17. Breakdown of Solos in *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Voice Type</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Felt a Cleaving</td>
<td>45-82</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>C4-G5</td>
<td>Dramatic full warm tone. Character is confused. Choir supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Aids</td>
<td>9-79</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>D4-D5</td>
<td>Some rhythmic challenges. Tone is almost conversational. Sometimes character is frantic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Scene No.</td>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Voices</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This Is What We Fear</strong></td>
<td>9-24</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>D4-F4</td>
<td>Character only sings 3 pitches. Speaking dialogue with “tester.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>By Night</strong></td>
<td>21-33, 48-51</td>
<td>Care-partner</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>F4-B-flat5</td>
<td>High solo calls for times of full dramatic sound and others of simple sounds with less color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sundowning</strong></td>
<td>4-138</td>
<td>Care-partners</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Tenor-B2-B4</td>
<td>Duet with chorus as support. Full range of dramatic expression and color required. Extreme ranges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead, Kindly Light</strong></td>
<td>14-57</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient &amp; Care-partners</td>
<td>Soprano Mezzo-Soprano Tenor</td>
<td>Soprano-F-sharp 4-E5 Mezzo-Soprano-C4-E5, Tenor-E3-A4</td>
<td>Trio with choir supporting. Strong tone, resolute character. Soprano and Mezzo sing almost in the same range. Tenor is high. Must be able to sing slightly over chorus and orchestra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Take Me Home</strong></td>
<td>3-12</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>E-flat 4-F4</td>
<td>Very small range, sung speech-like with a thin tone. Character is anxious. Challenging rhythms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regret</strong></td>
<td>1-59</td>
<td>Care-partner</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>C3-A4</td>
<td>Big vocal range. Tessitura is high and sustained at times. Must be able to sing with a simple tone and turn it into a very full sound with full color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why Am I in This Place</strong></td>
<td>5-113</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>A3-F-sharp 5</td>
<td>Character swings from comical to angry. Small speaking sections. Clear tone, little color needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love Bears All Things</strong></td>
<td>31-70</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s patient &amp; Care-partners</td>
<td>Soprano Mezzo-Soprano Tenor</td>
<td>Soprano-C4-A5 Mezzo-Soprano-C4-F5 Tenor-D3-F4</td>
<td>Strong resolute character from all soli. Strength and clarity of tone need to sing over orchestra and chorus. Chorus is supportive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a major choral orchestral work such as *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*, considerations must be made for the orchestra. The orchestra plays a vital role in collaboration with soli and chorus, but also stands by itself in an independent role at times. Szymko has scored the work for a 30-piece orchestra. The table below breaks down the instruments.

Table 2.18. Breakdown of Orchestra Parts in *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Flutes</th>
<th>2 Oboes</th>
<th>2 Clarinets in B-flat</th>
<th>2 Bassoons</th>
<th>2 Horns in F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flute 2 doubling</td>
<td>Oboe 2 doubling</td>
<td>-Doubling alto saxophone in E-flat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piccolo</td>
<td>English horn</td>
<td>-Doubling bass clarinet in B-flat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Trumpets in B-flat</td>
<td>Timpani</td>
<td>Percussion</td>
<td>Harp</td>
<td>Strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doubling percussion</td>
<td>Glockenspiel, marimba, snare drum, tenor drum, suspended cymbal, triangle, tubular bells, tam-tam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>4 Violin-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 Violin-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Viola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Cello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Bass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The orchestra has similar musical requirements as the chorus. The rhythmic challenges and vast number of meter changes require orchestra personnel who have excellent musicianship and aural skills. The orchestra will also need physical stamina to play for the full length of the work. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that orchestra personnel be proficient college or professional experienced players. Percussion and wood winds have particularly challenging parts that need proficient players. Sperry confirmed the author’s assertion saying, “They are not easy parts either to play or to count, but they are a lot of fun to play. They are idiomatic -- they lie well for the instruments.”

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60 Sperry, interview.
Examples of desired technical prowess according to Sperry and Retallack include the trumpet part in “Lead, Kindly Light.” It has a high tessitura that must be sustained. A less proficient player will experience fatigue making it difficult to perform the rest of the work or sustain a long practice. The marimba plays a leading role in “Memory Aides” and “Why Am I in This Place.” It is worth contracting players who have the technical strength to champion the character of these movements.

**Suggestions for Preparation**

*Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey* is a challenging work for conductor, soli, singers, and orchestra. However, with good preparation, both Retallack and Sperry assert it is an accessible work for most choirs with good musicianship and aural skills. It will require the conductor to have a comprehensive knowledge of the score, metrical flexibility, and gestural precision.

The choral rehearsal order depends largely on the discretion of the conductor and other factors such as rehearsal regularity, rehearsal length, and the previous preparation of each singer. Each movement varies in difficulty and length; the longest being around seven-and-a-half minutes and the shortest being a little over a minute. However, it should not be assumed that the shortest movement requires the smallest preparation.

“Take Me Home” is the shortest movement, but its rhythms are quite challenging and will require concentrated rehearsal. The author believes one solution to the rhythmic difficulty in “Take Me Home” is to perform it using all treble soli rather than all trebles from the choir. This will virtually eliminate the amount of rehearsal time needed for this piece, which can then be redirected to another piece. Szymko has agreed with this proposal. If sung by a choir, the

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61 Retallack, interview.
62 Sperry, interview.
rhythms need to be sung as written to keep it together. If sung as solos, the rhythms “can be slightly off, and it will still succeed.” This is a decision that will have to be made before rehearsals begin based on the conductor’s knowledge of the choir.

It is the opinion of the author, as well as Retallack and Sperry, that “Sundowning” is the most difficult movement overall and will require the most rehearsal time. It is the longest movement, requires the most stamina, and incorporates numerous meter changes and tempo fluctuations. A close second is “I Felt a Cleaving,” due in part to its dissonance and large range requirements. The author strongly advises that these three movements be rehearsed early and often in the process. Devoting time to these movements early will reap great rewards in performance.

An efficacious performance of Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer’s Journey requires a choir with excellent musicianship skills, abundant vocal stamina, and exceptional rhythmic skills. Due to the dramatic nature of this work, the choir also needs the ability to show a myriad of vocal colors. The choir is required to balance and blend not only among themselves, but also balance with an orchestra. There are no sections which require a great deal of vocal agility or coloratura. The greatest challenges include rhythmic precision, intonation, and vocal suppleness. Based on these requirements and challenges, the author would recommend a full performance of this work by a competent collegiate choir, an excellent community choir, or semi-professional vocal choir. The author does not believe this would be appropriate for an upper-level high school choir because of the vocal stamina it takes to perform 70 minutes of music. A high school choir could certainly perform one movement or several selected movements, depending on the choir

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63 Szymko, interview.
and the context of the concert. The author suggests the last three movements for a high school choir. The movements are not difficult and could be sung as written in order.

It is strongly suggested by the author that the conductor and choir learn as much as possible about the texts that were chosen by Szymko. It is all too easy to become preoccupied with learning notes and rhythms. The ensemble needs to be shown the overall architecture of the three-section work, and where each movement fits within those sections. An examination of each movement and its exegesis would shed light on the compositional process. The author believes this would result in a greater understanding of the work and lead to a more informed and enriched interpretation by the choir.

*Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey* is an emotionally powerful work. It addresses a currently relevant subject matter, Alzheimer's dementia, and its effects on patients as well as care-partners. The texts that Szymko chose primarily come from vivid examples of individuals suffering through this tragic disease. The texts address issues such as confusion, anger, strength, regret, and love. These emotions are not far removed from individuals but are universal for all people. In addition, it is rare to find someone who has not had contact with an Alzheimer's patient or care-partner. To ensure an effective performance, the conductor must enlighten the singers of these shared experiences. Then, the singers can connect with the text and create a meaningful performance for the audience as well as themselves. Choral music sharing this much emotional content can be cathartic and freeing, but it can also be exhausting. Both Sperry and Retallack conveyed emotionally charged stories from the earliest rehearsals through the performance. The author strongly suggests confronting these emotionally powerful texts early in the rehearsal schedule to allow as much time for the singers to process their own feelings as

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64 Retallack, interview.
possible. The conductor should be aware that even with ample time and preparation there may be singers who are overwhelmed suddenly during a performance. Retallack and the author have had experience with this in performance.65

Having access to a living composer is a resource that should be embraced and explored. The author strongly recommends the conductor contact the composer and enter into dialogue regarding the work, and invite her to collaborate for several days, providing feedback on the preparation. Having direct contact with a living composer is a luxury not available to most conductors and choirs performing major choral orchestral works. Szymko worked with both Retallack and Sperry during the preparation leading up to their performances. Both conductors spoke favorably of having access to Szymko and her knowledge of the work. Szymko is a composer who takes great joy in collaborating with others. She would be eager to aid any group performing her works.

**Suggestions for Performance**

*Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey* was written as a large choral, orchestral work. Retallack and Szymko both call it an oratorio. It does have oratorio qualities, such as an important choral component, but lacks any real interaction with the soli. As such, Retallack presented the work in an oratorio manner.66 The choir was placed upstage center and the orchestra was directly in front of them, downstage. Soloists were in front of the orchestra near the conductor. All performers used music and there was no staging or costuming. Sperry reported the performance was presented the same way at his location. 67

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65 Retallack, interview.
66 Ibid.
67 Sperry, interview.
During a conversation with Sperry, the author discovered a suggestion Sperry incorporated in his performance. The chorus put their folders down and sang directly to the audience, “I Sing to You,” from memory. Naturally that movement lead into, “Love Bears All Things,” which he decided to also have the choir memorize. Unfortunately, the choir was unable to sing the last movement from memory due to lack of rehearsal time. However, Sperry noted he would definitely recommend this option to others. He felt that performing both movements in this manner would provide a sense of more intimate connection from choir to audience that was important at the end of the work.

The author had originally wished to explore the idea of staging this major work. However, after conversations with Retallack and Sperry the author has decided against pursuing this thought. The space needed for the free movement of 60 chorus members and three additional soloists on stage would make it very difficult for the majority of performances to occur. Additional space would have to be found for the orchestra. The idea that this was written as a universal story rather than a personal story has also contributed to the author's decision. However, the author does suggest the judicious use of video images to enhance dramatic effect throughout the performance. If the images change too rapidly or show images that are disturbing, the audience might become too distracted. However, this effect would not require significant additional space and it would keep the images universal. Depending on the amount of stage space, another possible enhancement could be a trio of dancers to interpret the soli numbers or other poignant moments, such as in “Sundowning,” or “Regret.”

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68 Sperry, interview.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
Conclusion

*Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey* is a challenging major choral orchestral work that is accessible for a variety of choral ensembles. Much of its success depends on the preparation of the conductor and the willingness of the choral ensemble to commit to such a lengthy project. Its libretto gives voice to those with Alzheimer’s and their care-partners. In fact, in a choral setting, it has magnified the voice considerably, attempting to repel the loneliness accompanied by Alzheimer’s.

Szymko says, “I have witnessed over and over again the power of communal singing to awaken in singer and listener a yearning to be at one with… At one with what? I don't know, and I don't need to know the answer. Dispersing the illusion of separateness is what makes communion possible for the singer and the listener, to enter into communion with that for which they yearn.”

The texts Szymko uses address universal emotions of fear, betrayal, anger, and love. Her settings of these powerful texts deepen their meaning emotionally. The journey she takes the performer and listener on is difficult but cathartic. Despite the gravitas throughout the work, all involved in both performances expressed their gratification in learning and performing, *Shadow and Light: An Alzheimer's Journey.*

While this work cannot directly affect the Alzheimer’s patient, it has stopped the silence and started conversation. It has given a voice to those who previously had none. Szymko has crafted a shared musical experience that leaves the performer and listener alike with a sense of what this difficult journey of patient and care-giver is like. For many who have attended previous performances, they leave with an awareness of peace and enduring love.

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Finally, it is the author’s hope that this project will encourage not just further exploration and performance of this deserving work, but it will initiate research and programming of more music from Joan Szymko. Her music is imaginative, intuitive, and deserves further scholarship and performance.
Appendix A. Interviews with Joan Szymko, Diane Retallack, and Ethan Sperry

Interview with Diane Retallack

The following interview took place January 21, 2022. The interviewer (Paul Henderson) and Interviewee #1 (Diane Retallack) corresponded via Zoom; he from his home in Baton Rouge, LA, she from her home in Portland, OR.

DR We did three things. One is we spent several days doing an audio recording project to try to get it as perfectly done as possible, and that was actually like recording sessions. So, I could actually take a part of this and a part of that and so on and make it the most accurate performance -- recorded performance as we could.

PH Sure.

DR Then, we also just did a recording of the live performance. We had two performances; we could choose from the two. And then the third thing was the company AO Films that did the video documentary of the story of Shadow and Light.

PH Right.

DR So my approach would have been quite different [from Sperry’s]. First of all, we commissioned it, and if you read my notes, we commissioned Joan to write a 30-minute work for choir, orchestra, and soloists -- and that’s the rehearsal time I had built in -- And as you know, Joan wrote a 70-minute long…

PH Right, she did (chuckling)!

DR Laughing. We commissioned Shadow and Light because I was able to get an enormous grant that was just a first-time release of this grant. It was such a novel thing. It was a two-year grant for $125,000, and it was so new, they did not even know how to administer or keep track of it. And I got the grant and they sent me a check for $125,000. And then, at the end of the project, I had to submit a three-page report. So, it was not --

PH Wow, that is a huge gift!

DR I know. It was not the usual thing where they are checking in on you and they give you a certain amount of money, and you say what you used it for and everything. It was just an enormous gift. And partly because it was such an enormous gift with such freedom, we were able to do a lot of what we did, and just have free rein to create. With the Creative Heights Initiative, their main goal was to give a grant that took risks. Now how risky is it to commission a major work on Alzheimer’s Disease? Anyway --
Well, that was probably one of my first questions is what drew you to that topic to begin – or was that a topic that you gave her?

Oh, absolutely. I gave her the topic. I wrote the grant proposal specifically for what Joan wrote.

Okay. So, what led you to do it on Alzheimer’s?

Both my mother and my grandmother had Alzheimer’s Disease, so I understood a lot about that. I lived a lot of that. It was quite a few years after my mother passed away that I was able to even think about doing something on that subject. I find when I talk about it, that I’m even this far away, I get teary eyed, when I try to express what it all meant. But it was, wanting these voices to be heard.

Right.

And just for people to have some kind of source where they could have this touch them, that it could have them feel like their voices are heard, every monumental thing we go through is commemorated really in music, wars, and funerals and weddings and celebrations – there is something that we as humans express ourselves through art –about everything that is a major event. And for so many people, Alzheimer’s Disease, or any kind of dementia is an enormous thing in their lives, it is an enormous pressure, it is really something to live through. I know with my own mother, you know, she was a brilliant, beautiful, vibrant, active woman who got reduced to basically a child by the end. And so, I would go visit her at the retirement center where I had her, and I would drive home twenty minutes and I would scream the entire way, and I would put on heavy metal head banging music. So, I know there was a lot of expression inside of me that I wanted to have other people at least be able to know that they were being heard -- that their voices were being heard.

Mm-hmm.

But because of the enormity of this grant, which is with such freedom, I think everybody involved with the project went well over and above what was asked of them. I mean, like the video company, AO Films, so wonderful… and when I gave them the project, and they thought maybe they would do a 7 to 12-minute video, they were not sure where it would go, and then they ended up with almost an hour-long video. And nobody charged more, or said we are going [to] need more funds for this, they just sort of did it out of the goodness of their hearts and you know, they got involved.

Right.

And then Joan, you know, going from a 30-minute piece to really getting into it and ending up with almost a 70-minute-long piece. That was also an interesting thing. I had known Joan from her compositions at ACDA presented –

Mm-hmm.
DR  And I thought, “this woman needs to be acknowledged! She’s an extraordinary artist!” And so, she is the first person I thought of when I was going to do the commission. The commission was in my mind -- it was going to be a piece about dementia, I wrote up the whole grant proposal. The interesting thing with Joan was that she was unusual in that she had not had any contact with anyone with Alzheimer’s. And in a way, with her fresh eyes, that actually made things better because she did such research, and then we arranged for the video and the capturing of these interviews that she had with people that we met with Alzheimer’s.

PH So where did she – I know that’s probably a majority of the text, but where did she find the people? Did she direct them to care centers -- I mean did you direct them? Or did she --

DR  So we contacted, and I did most of this, I contacted the Alzheimer’s Association in Portland, and there was a wonderful woman I have not been able to find, by the name of Dawn who was my main contact, and she was no longer working there, and I haven’t been able to find her, so she doesn’t even know, I don’t think, that this piece happened -- but she was the one that made the arrangements for some of the people that we interviewed, and especially for Crystal Aikens, who had that Sing Here Now choir, of people who had Alzheimer’s and some were their partners or friends that we filmed, and that was a really important part.

PH That’s amazing!

DR  Yes. And then I just reached out to a lot of different people and found Sandy Tanacey, the one with the little dog, through one of my choir members and through our marketing director at the time, we found, gosh, what is her name, the woman, she, and her husband, we went into their home, and their mother was there – her mother was there in the wheelchair. So with each thing, with each interview, with everything Joan learned, the project just started getting larger and larger because Alzheimer’s disease is not one-dimensional. There are all these different stories to tell. And I was just so thrilled with how beautifully Joan composed and put this together. I just really think it is a masterwork.

PH It is the biggest work she has done, isn’t it?

DR  Mm-hmm, yes. And when I called her and asked her if she would be interested in doing this, and she said in the workshop that she held before the concert, and I was saying about Alzheimer’s Disease/dementia and everything, and she said “what I heard was, ‘Can you compose a major work? Yes!’” (laughing) Then when I got the grant, I was talking to her on the phone, and I was jumping up and down -- but it was a project that just took over my life for a couple of years. As I mentioned about the orchestra, we had previously hired outside orchestras, and what I found, through – I am a lot more knowledgeable now, through the American Federation of Musicians were a union orchestra, which it was, the people who come to the table about the negotiations about the recordings are the musicians themselves, and the Musicians Union, and the executive director of the orchestra. Well, we were none of those things, and so we had to form our own orchestra.

PH Wow.
DR And so that was the whole thing from the beginning, working with the union, with other people, with it forming – writing a master agreement, getting that ratified, holding auditions and selecting the music. They are our orchestra, and they are superb!

PH Wow! Well, that is great! I mean that is a wonderful – in Louisiana they have a French term called “lagniappe” and all lagniappe means is, just a little bit extra. Just a little more. Because the French are so excessive.

DR (laughing) So then in my preparation, of course, what I would do over again was not have such an enormous season, I had a whole full season. That was not the only thing I did that season. And Joan was composing, so I did not have the work a year in advance to study, I had bits at a time. I did not really get the full work until like a month or so before to really study the score. And Joan was continually changing things, even up to the rehearsals, even the recording sessions. But in the recording sessions, the musicians, the orchestral musicians were so focused, because they were being recorded, that I think it intensified them learning. Of course, my choir -- I had the choral parts earlier, and we were rehearsing, and I have an adult choir, which rehearses once a week in the evenings. So that’s not a lot of time, once a week. And it is pretty challenging in places, and then I chose the soloists with consultation with Joan. So, after we had done these recording sessions, we did the performance and recorded that.

PH Ok. So, do you feel like – this is a broad question, but do you feel like it was rewarding for your choir?

DR Oh, enormously so. Rewarding for my choir, rewarding for the orchestra, rewarding for the audience -- there were so many people –

PH How did the audience react when it was all finished and done?

DR Standing ovation…a lot of tears. People coming up to us…we had a reception afterwards where we had a little combo, we danced, and it was light, you know, but so many people saying, “How did you know to tell my story?” And it really touched --

PH Almost therapeutic is what it sounds like, for the audience, and probably for the choir and the orchestra -- therapeutic for them to hear these words, and to go through this journey.

DR Right, mm-hmm.

PH That gives me goose bumps. Let me see… So, I think you did say you worked with Joan in preparing to learn the score, but you just said that some parts of it you didn’t get until nearly the end. It must have been nice, even though that was probably a little nerve wracking, with the actual composer there to offer advice, or to run things by. How do you feel about that? Was that nice to have somebody like that working with you?

DR So having Joan there, I was trying to be as faithful to what she had written as I could be, more so than I would have normally been for myself. I didn’t really try to get my interpretation of what was written, I tried to be as faithful as I could to what she had written.
PH  Did you feel that was hard to do as a conductor? You kind of usually want to take things and make it your own, but --

DR  It was hard because there were tempos I would have taken differently, things that I felt differently, and Joan would state what it was that she wanted, and so I would try to make that happen.

PH  Yes. So, let us get to the nitty gritty of things. How did you start preparing the rehearsals? Like you just said, you had had some time with the choir, but then putting it together with the orchestra – so let us talk in terms first of the choir. You had that first, I guess, and so what was your rehearsal strategy? Which movement did you start with first, that kind of thing, if you remember?

DR  I don’t recall which movement I started with -- Movement 10, the big choral one, that was one of the ones later composed. I think I had to start with whatever was completed first and make my way through. But it is a very emotional piece, and I have a fine choir, so they pretty much get a sense of a piece. I usually go through an entire major work and have them sight read through it first to get the overall sense, and everybody was in tears --

PH  Oh, yes.

DR  -- and very difficult to sing, when you get to, “You Are My Sunshine,” which of course is a simple song to sing, but just being able to get through that -- all the sniffles and everything. I do not know if I can even say it without getting too emotional, but the text, the piece that was the most difficult for people to get through because of the text and how emotional is Number 14, “Hold Hands.” “You know you love me, but you can't recall my name, so we just hold hands.” That one just kills everybody. And then right after that they have to do, quite beautiful a cappella practically singing. Then go from that into, “You are my Sunshine.” When you see the video of my choir, they pan across, I have one member who was just bawling through the whole thing.

PH  Oh, gosh.

DR  So that was an issue just to be able to get emotionally through it too, even before we get to notes and accuracy of pitch and rhythm and stuff. I think it's Number 6, “Sundowning?” That one is quick and a lot of energy, once it gets past the introductory part. That one took a particular amount of work.

PH  What do you think was the most challenging for the choir -- what was the most challenging piece? Not the solos, but just the choir?

DR  I think Number 10, “Uncontainable Night,” because it is just a big choral piece, and it takes a lot to make that one come together. It takes a lot to make that one feel more connected and to go through the various moods of it. Whereas a lot of the other pieces sort of sang itself? We pretty much get the sense of how to sing through a lot these pieces, because they are just so beautifully written for choir to express and sing through.

PH  Right.
DR I think I particularly like Number 11, “Regret.” It is very honest and authentic. This is not glossing over or something. It is very -- sometimes things are very difficult, and it was a movement that says this can be very difficult and have sort of a bit of violence in it. Now, I did not have that with my grandmother or my mother. Debbie Jensen -- that was the name of the nurse who had her mother in her home -- experienced a lot of, actually the violent part. What speaks more to my experience was Number 12, “Why Am I in This Place?” Which sometimes Alzheimer’s and dementia experiences are sad and funny at the same time.

PH Mm-hmm. Right.

DR So, there are things about the orchestra you might want to just know. She did a lot of orchestration based on my forces.

PH Okay.

DR We had double winds, but my principal clarinet was also a fine saxophone player. So, you find that there is a movement where there is saxophone that was played by a principal clarinet. Also, my second oboe who was an excellent English horn player, so that is where that doubling would come from. And Joan would ask me, wanting to get more parts into this, more colors, more instruments what my players could double, and so that's how some of that came about.

PH Okay.

DR See at the beginning, the first movement -- I think it is the first movement -- the tympani is on the beat, the choir is off the beat, and sometimes it just needs to be explained to your player. You are not trying to coordinate with the choir. You are on the beat -- the choir. Of course, the tympanist does not have the choir part, so they do not know that they are singing off the beat.

PH Right. Is that the “Cleaving” movement? or –

DR Yeah, yeah. And so, at first, my tympanist was trying to play with the choir, and so there are things like that that you just say in your orchestra rehearsal. Probably the most challenging part I found for my wind players was Movement 6 in “Sundowning” measure 95, letter F -- the clockwork --where it goes from clarinet two -- clarinet one and clarinet two back and forth --and trying to get that seamless. I had really fine players, but they struggled with that. So, there are little places like that, say, that need some extra work.

DR I think we probably started with Movement 1, and I think we did have pretty much the full vocal score before I started with the choir, but –

PH So then, did you have them sing through the whole thing? You said you usually have them sing through everything and get the context of it, and then pick it apart. Is that what you did with this?
DR  I think I probably did that, yes. And so, I kind of had to think through, all right, what am I going to lead to as like a highlight? And I led to that “Lead Kindly Light,” and then of course, the emotional thing at the end there. (chuckles)

PH  Hmm. Well, “Lead Kindly Light,” it seems like -- was that -- was that a challenging movement? I can’t remember, it seemed like there’s a good bit more parts or something. Like they’re split up more, I don’t know. I just remember thinking that that seemed like that might be a challenge. Overall, what's -- go ahead.

DR  I was very grateful to have a really fine trumpet player. And then especially when we were recording it, we had to do multiple takes and it is a very high range for the trumpet to play, and he nailed at every time. You are hoping that he can get through the trumpet lines of that so that is one thing that is very challenging.

PH  So, would you say that it is more of a community group? It is not professional, right? Or is it?

DR  Well, my choir, we are a resident company of the local performing arts center. And the Eugene Vocal Arts is an auditioned group of accomplished singers. I called them unpaid professionals, basically. If pay was equal through both vocal and instrumental performers, they would be paid, but that would totally wreak havoc with the budget.

PH  So would you say it was challenging -- the whole work was challenging, not emotional, that is a given -- but I mean just purely musical? Was it challenging for them, or did you feel like it was not too bad?

DR  I would say it is moderate in comparison to some things we have done. We did Stravinsky’s Les Noces, that is more challenging.

PH  Wow! So, this is this next topic I want to talk about quickly, I want to explore in a way, and that is staging, and I wonder -- I don't think you did that…

DR  No.

PH  Do you think it could be possibly staged?

DR  I think that's probably a better question for Joan whether she would picture that. I don't know how you would depict some of what is being sung. I think something like “the whole damn house being burned down,” whatever. I could see maybe video images or something. But it is so expressive, just with the concert approach that I think people will see their own story in their minds.

PH  Okay. I don't know if you have heard or seen, “Considering Matthew Shepard?” At LSU a few years ago, they staged it. And it was incredible. They got permission from Craig Hella Johnson. And I thought, “I just wonder about this.” I don't know when I'm -- or if I'm going to ever be able to actually do the whole thing, but that was just something that I wanted to explore,
because there are vignettes that did pop out in my mind that could be done -- but maybe you are right. Maybe it just needs to tell its own story in people's hearts. I don't know.

DR  Yes, I have heard of the Matthew Shepard piece, I have not actually heard it myself. Did you feel like that enhanced the work to stage it?

PH  Well to be honest, I had not heard it without -- I had not seen it without the staging, so that was my first look at it. And the choir, they had the entire thing memorized like an opera chorus.

DR  So I am going to need to go in a few minutes -- another commitment.

PH  Okay. Same. Last thing if you could change anything or do anything differently about it [the project] -- your rehearsal approach or the actual performance, is there anything differently you might have done, or suggested to Joan?

DR  Well, I would have had a year to study the score.

PH  Right, that would have been nice.

DR  So, I mean, I felt like I had to really, really be on at every moment, so now that is a possibility because it is there. I would like the last movement to go a little faster. Joan disagreed. (laughter)

DR  So, I would just say that the last movement is more difficult than it looks because of the tempo being so slow it's difficult for the musicians to sustain that slow tempo and have any forward movement.

PH  Okay. Okay. Well, if that's all you can think of then I guess that's all for us today.

DR  I was I was just so thrilled with the piece, you know, I actually commissioned it to be named, “Remembrances,” which is why that was on our program. And like I said, a much shorter work. And through Joan's work, she felt that the piece was Shadow and Light, and I think that is an excellent title for it. I felt like musically there are all kinds of different ways that it approaches things and feels like it has got influences of even Bach and other composers that you could —

PH  I absolutely agree. I have told everybody that I have talked to about this “it's like she writes in a different universe,” she is not confined to her style. You hear her style coming out here and there, but that's unique, I think. I don't find many composers that can shift gears like that.

DR  Yeah. And I will say that the “Tangled Tango.” Oh God, I loved that. “This Is What We Fear,” Number 4, was the one that seemed to have a Bach influence for me. And “Lead Kindly Light” seems like it has the influence of a -- like a grand anthem. And then there are the driving, more violent parts —
Interview with Joan Szymko

The following interview took place January 27, 2022. The interviewer (Paul Henderson) and Interviewee #1 (Joan Szymko) corresponded via Zoom; he from his home in Baton Rouge, LA, she from her home in Portland, OR.

JS And I have to say that when I said “yes” to I am going be a composer, I wanted to compose music theater, which really fast forward -- relates to this piece that you are writing about, Shadow and Light, because there are the elements of storytelling, of buy in, from the listener?

PH Mm-hmm.

JS It is lyrical quite literally. Lyrics are so key and so important to telling [a] story. It is not just a musical experience. It is kind of a full-body experience, music theater –

PH (laughing)

JS My own yearning for belonging and my own yearning for good. Shadow and Light is very much about needing to belong and to be seen, and this is an idea that I come back to a lot in a lot of my music. And there is a real powerful moment in the documentary, actually, where I’ve just been to the rehearsal [of] the ‘y’all come’ choir and interviewed a couple people with Alzheimer's. When I came out of that experience, that's when I realized that the piece that I was
going to write had to be universal -- had to be a universal message and I knew what that message was. That last segment, that “I and Thou” section of *Shadow and Light* is very much about that. I am not my disease, you know.

PH Right.

JS I am not an “it.” I am a spiritual being, right?

PH Yes.

PH So, why don't we get into that? Let us segue into the genesis – we are almost back to that spot anyway of *Shadow and Light* and how it all started –

JS Well in between that period and *Shadow and Light*, there is probably about -- well over 200-300 hundred arrangements and close to 100 compositions. I mean, I did a lot -- I did a lot of writing.

PH You are prolific – I mean (laughing)

JS I would not have come to have this opportunity if I had not been a published composer whose music Diane happened perform.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS But I said “yes” because I had a great opportunity to write for chorus and orchestra, which is something I had never had the opportunity to do before. This was supposed to be a half-hour work. And I realized very early on, with all the research that I was doing, and just -- incredible textual material, that it was not going to happen. I told her early on, “I think it's going to be about 45 minutes.” Tack on another 20 minutes after that. And the reason it became such a massive work is because of how I decided to construct the piece. I constructed it with a big arc, like a program, like I would a concert program, to tell a story to tell a bigger story, and a story that was from the perspective of a person with Alzheimer’s –

PH That came from your previous background in music theater type stuff.

JS Yeah. Well, honestly Paul, I think my storytelling is even more so, illustrated with my programming. I have been incorporating spoken word with choral performances for 20 years -- more than that.

PH Right.

JS I think “Shadow and Light” does this -- I combine really – okay, I'll just I'll just be frank - - an exquisite sensibility about marrying words and music. That, I think, is my greatest gift. And that gift is what makes me a good storyteller, you know?

PH Yes.
Okay. There we go. All right and genesis of the…

To how it came to be?

Yes, yes.

Okay. As you know, because you've already interviewed Diane Retallick, this really was her baby. But it was a real gift for me because I never in a million years would have selected this subject matter to write my first oratorio about -- I mean it is a story, and just because the heft and the length of it really is more of an oratorio. And so, she was applying for a huge grant -- and by the way, she probably told you this -- this was a Creative Heights Initiative in Oregon, through Oregon Cultural Trust. It was the first time that they had opened up such monies to the arts. And this was one of just three applications that won the full amount -- I think was $125,000 grant. But it was to commission the work, and not only to commission the music, but for me to create the libretto, which was no small task, and to support the documentary being made, and then of course, to support the rehearsing and recording of the work.

Mm-hmm.

I don't know how much they had to raise but the orchestra was incredibly expensive. So, I said, “Yes, please, please put my name in there as the composer.” And I just had a feeling about it. I knew it was going to happen. So, she originally asked me in February or something. I think by the next August it had gone through all the the process, and I got word that [it] was going to happen. Initially I was ecstatic, and then I was, “holy crap! I have to write piece about Alzheimer's/dementia! What do I get myself into?” (Raising voice)

(laughing)

Well, I mean, it felt overwhelming –

Oh, sure.

-- because I had absolutely no experience with Alzheimer's. I just knew what the average person knows about it. That it is something everybody is really afraid -- doesn't want to get, or they are dealing with parents with dementia. I really did not know anything about it. And so, I threw myself into research, both scientific, and looking for creative expressions of people who did have experience with Alzheimer's/dementia. So, I found books of poetry by care partners. One person in particular, Sean – I want to say Leven -- I can't remember if that is his name or not. Anyway, his little slim book of poetry was powerful and one of the key pieces, “Sundowning,” is from that book. There are a few pieces of poetry by people who weren't poets. There was this one book that was influential for me that was people who had loved ones with dementia who went to a poetry workshop and wrote poetry. I think one of the most wrenching, moving pieces was written by, as it turns out, this high-powered attorney in the Bay Area. Okay, I [have] got to pull this out now –

(chuckling)
No, because again I can't remember his name and it's driving me crazy -- I think it is Richard -- no it is Forest, Forest Hainline. It is the beginning of the third section, which is the “Be Here Now” section, and the narrator says, “I am going to give you three new words. Be here now.” Be present. Right? And it is a simple, “you know you love me, but you can't recall my name, so we just hold hands.” This is a very tender, short segment, but it has this (flipping through the score, singing intervals) Oh……. And it is kind of overlaying – let me get out of there, hang on a second. I am sorry, you know which piece I’m talking about. It is that – I'm just trying to get my piano – oh, it's not plugged in, so it won't sound anyway.

I was just amazed by how many different sources I got powerful material from, and contemporary material as well as traditional material.

One of the things we were talking about last time was the selection process for that. And I know it's difficult, so tell us a little bit about the first movements. You know there are moments when I have a big chunk of something to do, or a larger piece, what I'm getting at is that there was a poem that I found, and when I found it I was like, “Oh, my God! Thank God! Now I know what I have to do.” And with Shadow and Light, for me, that moment came from the most unexpected place. Not from poetry or scripture, it came from the Mini-Mental Exam, which is a cognitive exam administered to folks to see how they are doing cognitively. The same person will take that exam over a period and then get scored on it. This was where my light bulb went off about how I was going to structure the piece. It came from one of the questions in the Mini-Mental Exam, and it also is a question that is asked by the narrator in the second movement after the introduction of the horror story. Then each time there is this very simple device, which is just that simple bass line, which comes from the tango when the narrator comes in, “I am going to give you three more words.” This time the care partner is answering. And this is about what the middle section of the piece is.
about, which is perspective and experience of the care partner, who was also experiencing great loss.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  And what they are feeling is heartbreak, stress, and resilience, which is important. And that word, “resilience,” is what made me choose -- in fact, I don't know if it was chicken or egg - - maybe I set the piece first and then wrote the text. But there are moments when you have a choice, fall apart, or take a deep breath, and do what needs to be done -- feel a new loneliness and a new strength. It is a text like this, which is very specific to Alzheimer's/dementia, but also a universal expression of those moments that all of us have in our lives, unless you are very lucky or fortunate –

PH  Right.

JS  -- when you have to make extremely difficult choices.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  Even if it is just to get out of bed in the morning. Then, the idea, “I'm going to give you three new words,” which is towards the end of the piece, which is the “Be Here, Now,” which I referenced before. The Mini-Mental Exam, it just all of a sudden, I'll never forget, I wrote out the first outline of the piece of what I thought I was going to do. But of course, because of the plethora of material that I had, what was in those sections was changing. As a composer of music, I'm sure, you know, all of us have these little files of poems that we think we will set someday. One of those that had been in my file for years was “Lead Kindly Light.”

PH  Mmm.

JS  Well at some point, you know, my light went off and I'm like, “Oh my goodness!”

PH  Yes.

JS  This is perfect!

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  Because what that piece does from a dramatic perspective, is it brings everybody together, and all the soloists stand out in front of the chorus and orchestra and sing that together. “Amid the encircling gloom, the night is dark, and I'm far from home. Keep thou, my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.” Just do what needs to be done.

PH  Right. Just take one step at a time.

JS  I just drew from all different places. The opening movement, Emily Dickinson. People wrote about death quite a bit.
PH  And then the second was the “Tango.”

JS  The “Tango” –

PH  You did that.

JS  Pardon?

PH  Didn't you write the words for that?

JS  I wrote the lyrics to the “Tango” to the change, but they were inspired by the Mini-Mental Exam, right?

PH  Uh-huh.

JS  The lead is asked to spell the word “world” backward, which actually is kind of tough, even if you don't have dementia –

PH  (Laughing) Yeah, I know.

JS  And she starts singing it, and then it becomes this, “My world is backward, upside down, inside out.” Another one of the lyrics comes from the Mini-Mental Exam. “Can you repeat this phrase, ‘no ifs, ands, or buts?’” This happens in variation before the song is sung. Why is there a tango? The reason being to honor Diane Retallack, who commissioned this work. I cannot imagine how she must feel, even now, with both her grandmother and her mother succumbing to Alzheimer's/dementia. That and being another female in the family – terrifying!

PH  Mmm.

JS  She is doing everything she possibly can to keep her brain healthy. One of those things she took up -- I don't know how many years -- anyway, she started ballroom dancing because she read that that was something that would keep your brain right, since it is crossing right over left.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  It is memory patterns, and of course it is physical exercise. When we first talked about this piece and Alzheimer's, she said that she was competing in tango with her teacher -- that was one of her specialties! So, I set this piece as a tango really for Diane, but it is one of my favorite orchestrations.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  I’m trying to remember, why did I want marimba? I am trying to remember why I made the choice of marimba, which is an unusual choice. I think why, because it's brittle – it is a brittle sound, and it just cuts through everything.
PH Mm-hmm.

JS It is used throughout the piece. It's not overused, but there are a couple pieces where it is really highlighted. One being “Memory Aids,” Number 3. I just love that sound with them, with the marimba, with these strings, covering the same chords. Of course, the strings have this swelling, emotional feeling -- and the marimba – it is just that the harsh, sharp harsh reality of what the person is singing about? Then later, the marimba comes back with another lead song by the mezzo-soprano in the comic relief song. The marimba is extremely playful in that piece. I really enjoyed -- maybe because I played those years that I was living on the island.

PH (laughing)

JS All I am saying is that it is brittle, it is sharp, it cut through, but it also can be warm. I think Diane was a little, “Really? You want a marimba. I’ll go get a marimba.” I mean it was really challenging to fit a 30-piece orchestra with a marimba and a harp and a piano! In some ways, I was not thinking about the piece being performed past the premier.

PH Right.

JS But to have these extra elements, it makes it more challenging to produce, so to speak.

PH It seems like she indicated that you orchestrated it for the forces she had, too.

JS Yes. It really is really an artsy community. She has a very successful community chorus organization that she has led for many years. She had, I think it was called the Mozart Players or something, that she would kind of engage them to do concerts with her when she needed an orchestra. For this, she created an orchestra to be under the umbrella of her arts organization. As far as the size of it, it was plenty once. I really wanted a full complement of winds. So, I felt fortunate to have a full woodwind section. It was so awesome, I have to say. The experience of orchestrating that piece was really awesome! I cannot really start writing anything until I know what the words are. I did play around with a couple of ideas, in terms of ostinati, but I really felt stuck until I knew what the text was going to be. So, creating that libretto was a huge part of this work. There were some pieces before I completed the libretto, I knew that were going to be included. I knew I was going to set the Emily Dickenson. I knew I was going to set the Philip Larkin, “This is what we fear.”

PH Right

JS The timeline was ‘13, 2013 the grant was written. I learned in August that it was a go. I started researching – was I off by a year? I know it took me a whole year to do research and to start composing. So, I researched from September 2014.

PH Yes. I think it was 2014 to 2015. And it was premiered in 2016.

JS Right. I finished the libretto sometime in late spring, 2015. I finished all my drafts, setting all the lyrics through the summer of 2015. And then I started orchestrating in late August. I'm usually more go-with-the-flow. I'm feeling it, I sit down, and I work. If I'm not, I don’t,
right? This was not like that. So, I had a calendar set up with my own personal deadlines -- I have to finish orchestration for this piece (smacking hands together) this by this date, because I had to have everything done by December. So, for about three months I worked at least 10-hour days every day --

PH Wow.

JS I really boned up on orchestration and balancing choir. This was such an incredible opportunity. I didn't want to make foolish mistakes with the orchestration. So, I was very studious, fastidious, and very careful. I have one friend, Linda Tutas Haugen, who has written a lot for orchestra, and I was asking her about something, and she was surprised I only had one double bass. And that is really all that was needed. She said, “something you could do” -- and it was so great, because I had a bass clarinet – clarinetist, “is to double lines with the string base and the double clarinet in places.” I was just soaking stuff up, spending hours at the computer. And, yes, using computer playback. Of course, computer playback kit does not and cannot give you a sense of balance. And it does not, for example, you can't expect an oboe to play a sweet, sweet little, gentle middle C! It ain't gonna happen!

PH (chuckling)

JS Even balancing -- particularly when I’m writing for the brass. This studying up that I did was really helpful. I mean, one trumpet can blow a whole orchestra away, you know.

PH Sure.

JS So, I really was very attentive to that. Anyway, I finished the orchestration in December, and unfortunately, I was so intent on getting the piano/vocal scores, because that is what Diane really needed to start working, by December. I don't know why I was still editing, I had solid drafts of the orchestra part, but for some reason she did not get the orchestration until like a month before the premiere.

PH Yeah.

JS Which was kind of late. I was just kicking myself, because I had it, but as far as deadlines, I was really focused on the piano/vocal score. Which, by the way, I really need to edit because I need to make the piano reduction more playable in some places.

PH (laughing)

JS This is to say that I have every intention of going in and editing that for sure. In fact, it was the summer of 2019 I was planning on rescoring it, using the summer to rescore it, and I didn't. And then -- have you talked with Ethan Sperry yet?

PH Not yet. He's next on my list.
JS  Okay, they were performing it in fall, 2019. I mentioned to Ethan, because I have had more interest in the work than performances, obviously, and a lot of it is just because it is a very expensive work to have a full orchestra. I have to hand it, Ethan will tell you, they were really committed to it. They did special fundraising for it. As Ethan will tell you, this double whammy: number one, being a new work, and two, being about Alzheimer's.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  I think some interest that I have had from people is because people have a personal connection to Alzheimer's, and they want to do the piece. There was supposed to be a premiere -- this was another COVID loss -- fall of 2020, it was going to be performed in Edinburgh, Scotland.

PH  Uh-huh.

JS  I have had a couple other people like that too. But I am torn about it because it is something that Ethan said to me. He said, “Yeah, that probably would be a good idea.” But he said, “You know, Joan, if you did that, probably nobody would do the full orchestrated version, and that would be a shame.”

PH  Yeah.

JS  So, I'm still thinking on it. And it is a time thing too.

PH  Right. Absolutely.

JS  Yeah, yeah. Anyway –

PH  Okay, well I'm sorry. I have got to go. We have got a lot of background stuff done, and that's great. So maybe we can get more into the compositional stuff?

JS  Well, yeah -- and I would appreciate if you have specific questions, why don’t you send them to me.

PH  Yes, I think I will do that because I want you to be thinking about if a new director is picking this up, I can tell them, “Look at this motive. You're going to see it several times.” Make sure that this comes out. Things that they would have to pour over the score for ages to figure out. Maybe we can give them a little bit of a cheat sheet for it.

JS  Sure, absolutely. And Ethan will be good to talk to in that regard.

PH  Yes, absolutely. I think that will be a good conversation too.

JS  He did a great job, and it was an incredibly powerful experience that Oregon Repertory had with the piece.
Yes. He said just like the one that Diane had, his people were emotionally so moved, and it was a great experience for everybody involved.

Anytime you open your heart up for whatever reason, it is a good thing.

I will be in touch with email and will try to schedule another time. I'll send you some leading questions you can be thinking about –

That would be great.

Sure!

That would be great for me to be able to use.

Yes. All right, thank you again so much.

Take care. Yes, you bet. Okay, thank you.

Bye.

Bye.

Interview with Ethan Sperry

The following interview took place January 27, 2022. The interviewer (Paul Henderson) and Interviewee #1 (Ethan Sperry) corresponded via Zoom; Paul from his home in Baton Rouge, LA. Ethan from his office in Portland, OR.

All right. Well, it is good to finally meet you.

Good to meet you too.

I have already visited some with Joan and I have scheduled another interview with her. Then, I recently interviewed Diane Retallack, so you're my next victim –

Great!

So if we want to get right to it –

Sure.

Great, great. So, you were, I think, the second –

That is right.
PH -- choir to perform this work, *Shadow and Light*. So, can you tell me, was it a rewarding experience for you and your choir?

ES Yes, one of the best. I've been with the choir -- this is my 11th year now. It was a highlight for everybody that sang in it, including singers who have been in that choir for 40 years -- everybody puts it on their list of favorite things we have done.

PH Wow!

ES So would the audience.

PH Yeah? Why would you say that? Why did it speak to them so?

ES So, I guess I am going to skip ahead to probably answer a later question. I love longer choral/orchestral works. They have always been a huge part of my upbringing. We sang them when I was in college. I was in the Boston Symphony’s Chorus. I was in the Los Angeles Master Chorale. I have always had a love for those. I think you have to go back to Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* written in the early 60s to find a major oratorio that is over an hour long and compelling. It is hard to find someone who understands how to paste a story over that timeline. Joan does understand that, and it is even more stunning because it is her first extended work. It is so much longer than what she was commissioned to write. Community choirs can have trouble learning that much music. There is quite a number of 25 to 30-minute-long compelling pieces that are making the circuit. That seems to be what everybody has been writing in the last 30 years for choir.

PH Mm-hmm.

ES This is much, much longer. It is a full single concert, “no holds barred” piece, and it works. Like the construction of the libretto, the dramatic pacing over time, and the way she builds to sort of her gut-wrenching climax and then releases it – it is amazing! I second guessed her when I first like looked at the score and I saw that “You Are My Sunshine” moment. I was like, “This is manipulative, this is not fair. You can't do this.” But she set it up and it's honest.

PH Mm-hmm.

ES It is not fake!

PH Right.

ES I cannot tell you how much we had to practice with the thought that we were going to be able to get through it without bursting into tears. She has really led you to that moment that you feel like you are there with your relative singing that text, “I sing to you the songs that that you once taught me.” I don't care how much or little experience you have with Alzheimer’s; everybody understands that moment, and she captured it perfectly. That is sort of what you need for a like a piece like this. You need that climactic moment where it has all been heading. You need to lead the piece to that moment, and then you need to give enough time for denouement.
That is apparently very hard because nobody since Benjamin Britten has pulled it off, again in my opinion, and relatively few people before that, right?

PH Right. It is a small group of pieces to pull from--

ES -- that are done again and again and again because they cracked that code. They figured out how to do that. Or in some cases, some of those pieces don't crack that code, but there are moments in them that are so great that everyone is willing to put up with the rest of the piece so that they can have those moments.

PH (laughing) Right. Right. So, how did the audience react when it was all finished?

ES Just absolutely, just, (shaking head in astonishment) absolute amazement. I also held the silence for a long time. I didn't put my arms down, and they certainly went with that, and we were very appreciative of it. We also had something, and I am not a very religious person, but we had something I would describe as a miracle during our final performance of the piece. We did an open dress rehearsal and then two performances. We perform in a large church where the stage right audience wall is glass -- not stained glass, glass-glass that looks out on this beautiful courtyard.

PH Mm-hmm.

ES While the piece was going on, a huge thunderstorm came out of nowhere and during all the darkest part of the piece it was pouring rain in that courtyard. It stopped shortly before the last movement. In the final movement, I queued the word “love,” a giant beam of light came through the clouds, through the window, and blasted over me and onto the choir.

PH Oh, gosh!

ES It was literally like I cued the sun!

PH (laughing) Oh my gosh!

ES Or Joan summoned it –

PH (cackling) No matter! That can make goosebumps come on you, wow!

ES One of the donors who helped pay for the orchestra was really invested in the piece. We were trying to put together a Carnegie Hall or a Kennedy Center performance, and they were interested in helping pay for that, but then COVID happened.

PH (ugh sound)

ES Now, even though I love the piece, it is going to take a few years before the audience is going to want to come to, ‘let's hear about illness,’ you know? So –
PH That was one of the reasons why when I looked at it, I thought, “I really need to write about this.” I saw that you were the last one, and it was starting to get some notoriety, and then boom, COVID hit. I understand was she was to speak at the World Choral Symposium in Australia –

ES That is right. My choir was supposed to perform there as well – my student choir. We were going to be the demo choir for her session as well for a lot of the pieces.

PH Gosh, (shaking head) this has not been a cool two years. Another perspective -- so, Diane got the choral score early on, then didn't get the orchestra score until right before. Did Joan do any revisions before your performance, after one, somewhere between?

ES A little bit. There were certainly edits, but I decided to do the piece, and I can't say I paid attention to it enough to know all the differences. I think that's a better question for Joan. I wouldn't say that there were any edits of substance. There was a lot of cleaning up and making some moments easier orchestration-wise or vocally, but I don't think she touched the heart of the piece in the slightest.

PH Right.

ES She came to several rehearsals, and she made some further suggestions. She is a great conductor as well as a composer. Most of her suggestions were like, “Would you please do what I wrote instead of –” (laughing)

PH (laughing) Wow!

ES -- She was much more polite – “but don't you see that it says mezzo forte there, doesn't it?” Just pulling my attention to every bit, every little detail. She wanted every single marking she put in there, and they are all there for a reason. There are composers like that, and there are other composers that mark less and have a little more freedom hearing their pieces a lot of different ways. Joan isn't one of those people, and she marks clearly, and she has a very firm vision. I think it is probably truer of composer/conductors because they're so used to forming that image of how my performance is going to go. I wouldn't say Joan and I had an argument, but we had a real lengthy and powerful discussion about that. I said, “I hear you about these things, but actually, now I get to perform it, and it may not go exactly like that.” When you’re sitting out there you can say, “Would you try a little faster? Would you try a little slower?” But mainly I'm just like, “Can you hear the clarinet?” I'm much more interested in the practical aspect. But, we are good friends and we have known each other for a long time, and it was cool to do this together because she lives here --

PH Yeah, have a freedom --

ES -- so she came a lot. It also helps because Oregon Rep singers has done a lot of her music, and some of them know her well. I've enjoyed that. There are a number of Pacific Northwest composers that we have been doing a lot. Music is so different when you know the composer.
PH   Mm-hmm. Right. And you had access to her too.

ES   Right. You know, I do really love Bach, but he ain't gonna be able to come to rehearsal!

PH   (laughing) Right, right. So, I don't know if you have your score there, or remember, but could you tell us what you think was the most challenging piece in the work?

ES   Yes. Let me get my score. Oh, I may have the wrong computer. Let me see if I have it still. (Searching on computer) Shoot! No, I do not, but there are only two pieces that I found really challenging for the choir to learn, and one is the opening movement. I think that is the hardest. I think it is possible -- I didn't ask Joan this -- she started down this road and she's like, “Wow, if I do it all like this it is going to be too hard.” The other one is the one that begins with all the big chimes, I think it's the 10th movement. It is the long one with all the tempo changes in it, and has the really fast section --

PH   Mm-hmm.

ES   That was all -- those were the two hardest ones. It wasn't until we got the orchestra there that that one really made sense to me, and I was able to piece together how that was supposed to flow as a large piece. I really began to think that is a real work of genius, to get all those different moods together. And her orchestration -- for somebody who's never done anything with orchestra before! Oh, my God! What a great ear for it!

PH   I know. She wrote more towards the pieces that Diane had available. There was a saxophone, there were some things you don't normally hear in an orchestra.

ES   Yes. I should also mention we spent a lot of money on this because it was important to do it right. We have had mixed luck with our orchestral situation in Portland. We went with the musicians’ union, and that's expensive. But you get people who can really play, and for a piece that nobody was going to have played before, on this timeline, I wanted it to be right. I had a number of those players -- and they're like stalwarts, people that play Portland Opera, Portland Ballet -- like major people in the scene. I ran into one of them in the hall at PSU a few weeks later and she wanted to thank me for doing that piece and hiring her because it was one of the most meaningful experiences she has had as a 'gigging' musician in Portland. So, the orchestra, who, you find that stereotype, you think they would be the last people to care, right?

PH   So, in your rehearsal, do you do you remember at all what you started with? Did you tackle that difficult piece, Movement 10, or Movement 1 first, or did you sort of ease them into it? Do you remember how you went about rehearsing?

ES   Definitely started at the beginning. We had to rehearse it because of the way we put it together. We did not have the soloists at the first rehearsal. Then, I had a day where the soloists came early, and the choir wasn't there yet. So, we were doing a lot of rehearsing in bits and pieces. We also had three rehearsals. We have never had three orchestral rehearsals for anything that we have done in my time here. So, I had two real working rehearsals and then an actual dress rehearsal.
PH  Mm-hmm.

ES  Very often when we have done oratorios with Oregon Repertory Singers, because of our budget, the first concert is the dress rehearsal. It is the first time we have played the piece from beginning to end without stopping. So, I wound up doing my rehearsal order based on who was going to be there. I do remember that we started at the beginning.

PH  What I am going to do is write a conductor’s guide for this piece, so if somebody picks this up, never having heard this, they'll have a better understanding of how it functions, and maybe how to rehearse it. I am going to throw some tips at them from people that have already done it and what worked.

ES  Especially those solo wind parts and the percussionists, you need good players. They are not easy parts either to play or to count, but they are a lot of fun to play. They are idiomatic -- they lie well for the instruments. The whole orchestral world gets by on very little rehearsal because they are doing the same pieces over and over again, and they are doing the same composers over and over again. With an orchestra, they are never going to play anything else by her because there isn't anything else by her. They are not going to know the piece. There isn't any of that familiarity to build on. So, hiring an orchestra to do Mozart Requiem on one or two rehearsals is a lot less scary than hiring them to do this on one or two rehearsals.

PH  Sure. Absolutely. It has never been done.

ES  Right. Building familiarity with the piece for the orchestra is a challenge -- and it's multimeter -- although intelligently multimeter. Joan understands that very well, what she is doing with that.

PH  She seems to have a good understanding of text and how to make it sort of flow.

ES  Right. But yeah, the meter serves the text instead of the other way around.

PH  Right, exactly.

ES  Of course, the instrumentalists don't have any text, but their lines are still very well shaped to downbeats. Most instrumentalists are used to understanding that this is what we are doing. There was a lot of logistics, with what's going on at this moment, and what do I need to know, because they've never really heard the piece before. Some of the longer notes, some of the fermatas, and some of the almost recitatives-like sections for the singers were tricky.

PH  How about your audience, were there a lot of older people in it, or was it pretty mixed?

ES  I mean our audience is on the older side, as is the audience for most community choruses. I was really worried about programming this piece because as wonderful as it is, Joan’s not famous, even though she does have a following in Portland. It is also, “why would I want to go to hear a piece about that? It sounds interesting but doesn't sound beautiful.” Or “I don't really want to cry for however long.”
ES We did have a free, open dress rehearsal for anyone that had Alzheimer's and their family and caregivers. It was hard to get the word out about that, and we didn't get a lot of takers for it, but we thought that might be a better situation for them than coming to like an actual performance. We have a small budget and small staff, so trying to figure out how to publicize this piece that way was challenging. Most of the sales were last minute for this. I think it was when the chorus heard it with the orchestra, and really bought into the piece, they worked on their friends, “this is actually at least somewhat an uplifting experience – you are not just going to be depressed at the end of this piece.” So, we did wind up meeting our budget, in terms of ticket sales, but it was a hard sell.

PH Yeah.

ES To convince people to take a risk on an unknown composer, to sit and listen to music about Alzheimer's… I love choral music, but that doesn't sound like a good way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

PH (laughing) Right, true, but I think she sets it so well that there is a calming sense when you leave. I felt like that was sensitively done for her.

ES Sure, yeah. But nobody knows that when they're buying a ticket.

PH Right, right. So, here's a question, this is something I kind of want to explore. LSU did, I think in 2019 or 2018, “Considering Matthew Shepard,” and they staged it.

ES Mm-hmm.

PH Do you feel like that same kind of thing could be done for this piece, or do you feel like it needs to be strictly in the oratorio format that it’s written in now?

ES I would not want to stage it. I certainly do not think it needs it, and it is certainly not written with that in mind. You have some places where these people are characters, but I am not sure putting them in costume would help that work.

PH Sure.

ES Joan succeeded in writing a piece about Alzheimer's and not about a person with Alzheimer's. It does not seem narcissistic or individualistic at all. It seems putting costumes on people and staging it would make it seem more individual, like we were telling a specific story. The beauty of the piece to me is that it is not – it is telling everybody’s story. I'm not sure I’d want to disrupt that feeling. I guess you could have the people change costumes. But I think there's something about staging it that would be hard to do, in my opinion, without getting in the way. One of the beauties of the piece is that sort of transcends any individual story.

PH Hmm. Telling the story for a broader audience.
ES That’s right. “Considering Matthew Shepard,” I don't think is narcissistic. I think it goes the other way around. It is about a specific person and a specific story, and that's very clearly in the title, but it does take one person and talk about a very real issue of prejudice. It succeeds in universalizing it as well. Because it is the dramatization of actual, real events from a single moment in time, I think it lends itself more to that. That is not to say that some creative director wouldn't come up with some cool idea and then it would work.

PH Right.

ES I do think that is one of the joys of a concert piece versus a staged piece. It has that more universal aspect where we have to engage our imagination more.

PH Let's see. I think that is really some of the big things.

ES Sure.

PH It was great to visit with you. And you, like Diane, had a very positive reaction to it!

ES Yes. I called every major symphony chorus preparer that I know in the United States saying, “You have got to get this piece in front of your music director.” Oratorios never take off when they are just the purview of community choruses. Some symphony orchestra has got to buy in. Whether that is Dallas Symphony or Los Angeles Phil or New York Philharmonic, someone should pick this up.

PH Do you think your average community choir probably could do this?

ES Of course!

PH You think your community choir is about average?

ES Yes. But we also only spent four rehearsals on it. I mean –

PH Wow.

ES Certainly any community chorus that is singing the Brahms Requiem would have no trouble with this. Even one that can sing the Faure Requiem can sing this. I don't think it is harder. It is a longer, but it is in English. I think there are only a couple movements that are hard. Joan’s voice leading is just superb, so even things that sound hard tend not to be that hard. The barrier, the other thing -- this should go in your conductor's guide. I've been thinking about this more in a lot of my work because I do a lot of stuff with nonwestern music. You were talking about the flow that she has through the multimeter, and the text sounding natural. If you get it right, the text does sound natural, but it doesn't look like that on the page. There is a tendency when we see multimeter to really ‘brain’ apart the rhythms, and then you don't get the flow of the English. So, this is a thing in music education that we are teaching a lot now, sound before sight. If you listen to a recording of a really good choir singing it without the music in front of you first, you absorb a lot of the sound and the ethos.
ES You know, if we want to do respect to African music or Filipino music, listen to a choir of that culture sing the piece. We get those constructs but listen to it before you see the music before you have that ‘brainy’ connotation. It is also true in pop music. Pop music always looks weird on the page, and then then you hear it and you're like, “Oh, that's how it goes.” I think Joan’s piece would benefit a lot from like a good recording, or even like Joan demonstrates it so beautifully when she comes into rehearsal.

ES And it's all there, but like if you try to approach it with your brain, it doesn't always compute. It comes out kind of sounding – we count really well.

PH You have to work hard to make it not feel natural and easy.

ES I do think that is something that really needs work in Joan’s piece to make it have that flow, because the flow is really there to be found, but it looks weird, so people engage that left brain thing.

PH If you had to do anything differently, knowing you are on the other side of this thing, would you have? Would you approach the rehearsal differently if you could do it again?

ES I think I would spend some time either listening to a recording of some of those pieces first, or even do some of what I see Rollo Dilworth do a lot before we open the music -- me just sing a line and have them sing it back before they look at it and stare at it and try to brain it apart. I feel like we spend a long time learning the rhythms correctly and then unlearning. Having to do that extra step could have gone faster, like “repeat after me.”

PH Right. Okay.

ES There is not anything else I would do differently – uh, yes -- my choir memorizes slowly. I decided later in the process that we needed to memorize the “I Sing to You.” and then it just would have been more effective if I had told them they have to memorize the “Love Bears all Things.” That look, at a certain point, they are just going to put their music down and sing directly to the audience. My choir shies away from that. They are not great at memorizing, but it just would have made the work so much more effective.

PH Mm-hmm. That would have been cool.

ES They did get that part right, but I was amazed at how many of them were still not well memorized on it. Choirs that rely on reading music tend to be very bad at memorizing things, but I do think there is tremendous benefit to that. It would not work at all if you were like, (mimics holding folder and singing) “You are My Sun…”
PH  (laughing) Right. Yes, that would really be great to connect, in the context of things. That is a great idea.

ES  Yes. Fortunately for me, I am far in my career and have done enough oratorios, I knew how much time this was going to take for score study, and I cared, and I did it. This is not an easy score for the conductor.

PH  Right, right. I got, I bought one and it's all over the place.

ES  That is right. It takes a lot of attention, especially because it is not a piece that people know. So, you do need to be all over cues that aren’t necessarily the most important thing in the piece to bring to life. And, because the orchestra is going to have relatively little familiarity. I believe you cue for substance and only rarely for security. Once you get to concert everybody should be secure, but there is no way the orchestra is going to be secure. So, trying to know it well enough that you can hit those cues for the orchestra but still be with the choir or the soloist in making music with them. I guess that is one of the things I feel like I did well, I realized how much time that was going to take, and I spent it.

PH  (chuckles) And how long did you all rehearse this?

ES  We had four Tuesday night rehearsals and then we went into concert week.

PH  Good grief! That is incredibly fast.

ES  Yes. I think I did give them the music over the summer. It was the second time in a row that I had done that and did ask them to work on it before we came back. That is one of the things I’ve preached to my community choir, if you do your work, then we can make music every Tuesday instead of plunking out notes for five Tuesdays and making music during concert week.

PH  Right. Okay. Well, I guess that's it. I will be in touch if I've forgotten something. I'll just shoot you an email, and we'll just sort of play by ear. But thank you very, very much! I appreciate your insight and wisdom.

ES  Take care.

PH  All right, you too. Thanks so much.

ES  Bye.
Interview #2 with Joan Szymko

The following interview took place February 17, 2022. The interviewer (Paul Henderson) and Interviewee #1 (Joan Szymko) corresponded via Zoom; Paul from his home in Baton Rouge, LA. Joan from her office in Portland, OR.

JS I got a couple texts, or a definite text was one of the epigraphs from her book, the “Phillip Aubade.” And then just other things that she would – because she is a very well-versed writer – she has all these literary references, right? So, the literary references in that book were really inspirational for me, and kind of put me in certain directions.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS And, I remember her saying that if there was one catchword she would use for the experience of dementia and dealing with dementia, she said it would be misery. And the book really, really depicts a lot of misery. She also talks a lot about, for lack of a better term, the politics of Alzheimer's. If the government really understood that one person with dementia is not just one person with dementia, it is a whole nucleus around them whose lives are absolutely uprooted and disturbed, it is a huge thing.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS So I started out in the horror in, “This is what we fear, no sight, no sound, no touch, no taste,” nothing. What are we? Are we thoughts? Are we our memories? Are we our brains? Are we our consciousness? Are unconscious beings not human? What makes you human?

PH Hmm.

JS And so, I went from this really dark place of Alzheimer's being this thing that just tears families apart, and tears you apart, to a place of, I have to find how this Alzheimer's all -- how this story is part of humanity, part of belonging to humanity, you know what I mean?

PH Mm-hmm.

JS So that is the kind of the journey that I went on. So from this Gillies’ book to Corinthians, “Love Bears All Things,” that was a huge, huge leap. And I had to take the singer and the audience with me. And to make it believable, we had to visit the horror. I mean all the way through, almost through to the end – even that Number 12, which is kind of the lighthearted, breaking the dark energy piece, right?

PH Yes, like “I got my underwear stolen twice.”

JS Yes, “The guy in that room next to me is stealing my underwear, and he wants to marry me too.” (laughing) What I mean is like going from that and even right before that – I think it was the moment before we see, right before “I hold your hand.” It is funny. Also, I was going through this and I was thinking, “Oh my God, the last three movements almost make the whole
first part of the story bearable.” Not musically, but just in terms of just emotionally. It is like you are allowed to feel fully open and vulnerable with what is.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS I think those last three movements – but right before that is the funny song about being in the nursing facility, is the 'not so funny.' We haven't talked about that piece, “Remembering.” Near the end when sunshine comes out…Right? It's still up to that moment, it's still looking at this really kind of wretched, horrible thing. But even in that piece, “Remembering,” it's such a beautiful line where it opens up, “still feeling beauty, kind eyes, warm smile,” it's quite lovely, actually.

PH Right.

JS I also read books by this guy, in fact, one of his quotes is in the – Richard Taylor. He wrote this while he lived, and he spoke, in front of audiences for ten years after having been diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's, and his line – (looking at score) oh yeah, it’s in “This is what we fear,” “I know I just don't know what it is that I don't remember.” Where is that line, I can't – I can't remember which movement it’s in – (flipping through pages) It's there. “I'm afraid of being dependent,” it is about all the things, “yeah I'm afraid of dying, but these are the things I'm really afraid of being a burden, of being out of control, of life without memories.” So, this quote here, “I reached a point of where I know I don't know, I just don't know when I don't know; the living and the living unknown frightens me more than death.”

PH And this, you've got this Phillip Larkin, so that is where this comes from then? The text?

JS No, the text is Phillip Aubade. Hold on, no, no, no, Philip Larkin from “Aubade.” I keep calling him Phillip Aubade.

PH Right. The book he wrote was “Aubade” then?

JS Yeah…and I wrote, gathering from everything that I've been reading, I wrote the first four lines that start with, “I'm afraid.” And then that last quote, “I've reached a point where I don't know…” and that is in a different… I know that that is in the score, it is credited. Let's see –

PH And so was Philip Larkin affected by Alzheimer’s –

JS No, no. Philip Larkin was a very famous British poet. He was rather dark, and he wrote a lot about death.

PH Oh, okay.

JS “Aubade” is just a poem about death, it is not about Alzheimer's, just about death. And actually, when you look at the libretto, a lot of the – let me see how many are actually about Alzheimer's – “Memory Aids,” “Sundowning,” “A Choice,” “Take Me Home,” “Regret,” –
actually probably, about I'd say about 2/3’s of them were directly related to Alzheimer's, or from
books that were about Alzheimer’s.

PH  This “Memory Aids,” by Gail White, so this person must have been –

JS  Right, she was someone who was the care partner. I drew, as I mentioned last time, I
drew from a bunch of different sources.

PH  Obviously, “Song of Solomon,” we know where that comes from.

JS  Well, do you want to just go through them one by one so that I can just tell you?

PH  Well, I think we know the first one is Emily Dickinson. And –

JS  That was just Emily being Emily. (laughing)

PH  And then the “Tangled Tango,” I know you wrote that.

JS  I wrote that, and that is about Alzheimer’s.

PH  For Diane.

JS  Yeah. “Memory Aids,” I am trying to find which book that is from. No, I do not know, I
can not remember where I got “Memory Aides” to be perfectly honest. But I found Gail. I got
permissions for all these things.

PH  Oh, I thought she was the caregiver that you met when you were interviewing all those
people.

JS  No, no, no, no. Those experiences of meeting people totally influenced me and my
writing, but I did not gather any lyrical content from any of those interviews. No, the meeting
and speaking with all of those people just helped inform, and it just opened me up.

PH  Right.

JS  So, anyway all of these lyrics came from sources other than the people who were
interviewed.

PH  Okay, fair enough. So, then “Sundowning.”

JS  Sundowning. Okay, this is the book (holding up book Oblivio Gate) I’ll show you. What
I mean – I’m not a writer. I don't think of myself as a writer. I do appreciate poetry, I read a lot of
poetry, but I have to say that just as a piece of literature, as a poem, that this poem is the
strongest poem in the entire work. And – oh! (flipping through book)
Well, it was one of the most visually moving. You can imagine in your head what's going on.

I was looking at your questions. I mean we can go through movement by movement if you want, if that is helpful for you? So, this was from Sean (holding up book) “A Choice,” and I mentioned this was from this graphic memoir (holds up book) *Tangles*.

*Tangles*, okay.

And it is all about her mom who had really early onset, like in her early 50s. This was, for me personally, one of the most moving things that I read, *Tangles*. And this was the story I told you about a choice, or moments when you have a choice, and this line comes from after she talks about going upstairs and finding her mom in the bathroom with sh*t everywhere in the bathtub and having to clean it up.

Right.

So, “A Choice,” (flipping through books) is, from – and this is all in – I think that the orchestral score has a more – oh no, the libretto credits are here, from *Tangles*, yeah. That is from this here. (Holds up book.) And “Lead Kindly Light,” which is interesting. The question that you sent me was, how did I choose the text for each movement? You know, sometimes the text chose me.

Hmm. Mm-hmm.

You know?

I think that is a wonderful text, I really do. And it is set not contained to one, “This is Joan’s style” (holding hands up together and she is shaking head side to side) and she only does Eric Whitacre and Morten Lauridsen, those guys.

No, no, I have never written like that.

And this trumpet at the beginning, it sounds like some kind of Americana, very classic.

It is a call to, I don't wanna say *arms*, it is a call to *witness*, you know.

Hmm.

I mean what does that kind of opening suggest? “Lead, thou me on amidst the encircling gloom.” It is a call to action.

Mm-hmm.

And again, I have to say this, and I have mentioned this before, I am extremely intuitive, right? So – and this speaks to the whole issue of style. I follow my intuition, which is a kind of
exploration, right? It is different from the kind of exploration of, oh my gosh! I'm fascinated with this sonority, or I'm fascinated with how I can orchestrate by experimenting with layering in a very mathematical... it is extremely right brain. Thank God I have a left brain, because I could not do anything without it. But I lead with feeling, with insight, with all that. So, getting back to Number 8, to “Lead Kindly Light.” So, the text, no sh*t Paul, I had this text sitting in my little folder of possible texts to set forever. I mean honestly, for over 10 years I've had that. And I had it and it was a Xerox of something that I had found. I don't even know where I found it. Because I didn't find it at church. I don't go to church, except for when I’m the music director. (laughing)

PH   (laughing)

JS   No. Anyway, what I'm getting at is that I did not learn it personally as a hymn. I did not even know that it was a famous hymn text until after I had decided to set it and I just thought, “Wow, what a great text!”

PH   Yes, I knew it as a hymn text.

JS   I am sure you did! And there were all the other verses, too, that I had no idea existed, but I only wanted this verse. So, I mean it suited. It was just so PERFECT!

PH   Right.

JS   And it was perfect... and I think I mentioned it is kind of in the middle, it is like right in the middle – where the three themes come together, the person with Alzheimer's who's trying to forge ahead not knowing this from that. The care partner is trying to, (waving hands in a circular motion) And then, just the old – and the light being the third character.

PH   Mm-hmm.

JS   It all comes together in that piece. God, I'm getting goosebumps just thinking about it, because when I say I am an intuitive composer, I'm a goose bump composer. When I am composing, and if I get a bodily sensation of something, I know it is the right way to go. And with this piece, this was one of those pieces that almost kind of wrote itself. Once I got into, “The night is dark and I am far from home,” and that kind of repeats a bit of a sequence.

PH   Mm-hmm.

JS   But then, (singing) “Lead Thou, da-da,” it is very broad, and it was like, “Yeah, baby!” This is exactly the kind of support and inspiration. The feeling that all of these characters need.

PH   Well, everyone is participating. The orchestra –

JS   – and every person –

PH   – the soloist, the chorus – everybody is involved in this movement. Strong statement.
JS  Right, everybody. And, I mean, “The night is dark, and I am far from home.” As I said before, just my desire to make this a universal piece. What could be more universal than that feeling? Have we not all been there? Right? But here is the kicker, this is the hard part, the last part of this verse, “I do not ask to see the distant scene,” where I end up. How is this gonna play out –

PH  – down the road.

JS  It is that whole Buddhist thing, or AA thing, or whatever. One day at a time. One step at a time. One moment. Now. This is all you have is the now. And so, by the end of this whole piece that is all that they have is the now. And whatever fleeting connection can be felt in that now.

PH  Right. Live in the present.

JS  Yeah. Yep. Yep. So, “Are we going home?” (chuckling) And maybe I told you this, I wrote this in the bathtub. I was taking a bath. I've done that a couple times. I think there's something about water. I think I respond to water.

PH  (laughing)

JS  But no, I just remember I was soaking – this is probably overshar ing – but I have an extra-long clawfoot tub, and I really was in the bathtub, and each of those different lines, (singing) “Are we going home?” (singing) ”Are we going home now? I wanna…” Yes, it is like each of these voices, like the first one is childlike with anxiety – (scrunch up face and sing, shaking fists) “Take me home.”

PH  Right.

JS  And then the, “When are we going home?” – dolefully. These directives in this piece are really, really important. I think Diane did it with, no I think they did it with solos, it's easier to do with solos. Because, the reason why the timing of this is so crazy is because I transcribed my own voice. I sang it. I did a multitrack recording of it, and then I transcribed it. I just felt the timing of it felt so right to me. I didn't want to try to stuff it into something, so I just transcribed it as I sang it. And that's why the rhythms are so weird.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  I am a control freak. When it comes to my music, I hear it. When you compose it you hear it a certain way. I know there are composers who are like, “Oh yeah, sure. Oh no, yeah.” I'm not that person. You know I have – and I think I mentioned to you before – I have so many damn tempo markings in there, because I mean it.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  If I did not mean it, I would not have them in there. I would just say allegro assai. I mean I would not – you know what I am saying?
PH Right. *Andante* and we will leave it at that. (Laughing)


PH Right. No, in fact I have included that in my writing.

JS And I had a kind of ‘come to Jesus’ moment with Ethan Sperry. And I said, “Ethan, I am so sorry over this,” I said, “because this is so incredible for me. I rarely get to hear my music performed at this level, and so I am in a tumult. And I am so sorry. I think you sound great.” So, like we had this ‘come to Jesus’ moment, it was before the last rehearsal with the orchestra. And I spoke to the singers... Yes, I'm getting all teary about it now, and I let them know just how powerful their performance was. So many of them, that whole week were just telling me afterwards “this is the most powerful experience I have ever had singing a choral work. I have never sung anything like this before. Oh thanks...” and so many of those people with people in their lives with Alzheimer's – just blown away. Yes, so Ethan and I had a little bit of a lot, but we worked it out!

PH He had great things to say about it.

JS I am sure there are some good insights as well. So, we were on, “Take Me Home,” written in the bathtub.

PH Right.

JS No, but getting back as far as performing it, it has been performed by soloists, which I think it works because if it is slightly off from the written, it is not going to be like ‘make it or break it.’ Really, if you are going to do it chorally as an ensemble, as the women in the group, you have to do the rhythms as written. There's no fudging. And they're complicated. And as you know, singers do not often have the best...unless you are working with professionals.

PH No, I–

JS They see, they are looking at, (laughing) (snapping and speaking the rhythm) “I wanna go...” It's not like “WHAT? What are those, triplets?

PH I think it would probably work – I'm glad you brought that up, I think it probably would work actually better with soloists.

JS Well and it has.

PH It would almost give a face to a person.

JS And it did. Actually, when it premiered, the women were in different places in the choir, and they really sang out. They were not by [mics] – but we could hear them come through. Did you see the video of it?
PH  No, not yet. I've got –

JS  Oh, you have it, okay. But speaking of – okay, here I'm veering off. I'll make this a really short veer – what is nice about the DVD, it is the performance. But the performance did not have supertitles, but the DVD does. I had a comment from a couple friends who said, “You know, gee, when you do this in Portland, it would be so great if you had the supertitles because it's so powerful to see.” If it's performed well, and the diction is good, you can understand. But sometimes it is hard with an orchestra.

PH  Sure.

JS  But, I'm one of those people who really wants to know what they're singing. I don't just sit back and like, “Oh, it's in French. Okay, you know? That sounds nice.” I want to know what is being sung.

PH  Right, right.

JS  So, this experience of going to a concert like this, is not the best experience, you know? Oh my God, I'm such a diction stickler. One of the best compliments – I mean, you don't want to interfere with the musicality of the piece for sure, but one of the compliments that I most appreciate is an audience member saying to me, “I could understand every word!” And they always sound shocked! Because when you go to a choral concert, when can you understand every word? But this is to say that this is a performance, the thing you're writing about, a guide? Um, that – I find supertitles distracting too, because then you are not taking in the performers, you are reading.

PH  Yes, I hear you.

JS  Whatever. So, oh my God, in this “Uncontainable Night.” God, I love this poem. I would love to learn German just so I could read Rilke in his original language, you know.

PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  I find Rilke to be one of my favorite poets. And I find him so compelling. I do have a couple pieces in German settings, one of which I think is a really excellent piece, I think it’s one of my favorite pieces, “Herbst.” And (quoting part of the German text) “I live my life in ever growing orbits.” Anyway, I love Rilke. I have a friend who is Joanna Macy is one of the translators of this particular poem –

PH  Yes.

JS  She and Anita Burroughs have translated a lot, and they have two books of poetry translations of Rilke. Let's just say that I had access to this translation. I took something that was from a different context and put it within the context of Alzheimer's. I think this piece is one of the strongest of that ilk.
PH  Mm-hmm.

JS  “Quiet friend who has come so far, feel how your breathing makes more space around you. Let this darkness be a bell tower.” Now who are they speaking to? Are they speaking to the person with Alzheimer's, or they speaking to the care partner, who also is having a different kind of misery, you know? This is why I think they're really speaking to the care partner, and this is in that middle section, which is about the care partner. This is starting to be a bell tower, and you, the bell. So, you're ringing in the darkness. You're trying to live your life in the darkness.

PH  Right. As you ring, “what batters you becomes your strength.”

JS  “It becomes your strength.”

PH  That is so powerful!

JS  Oh my God, “move back and forth.”

PH  That’s when you got the tingles, and you said I have to write.

JS  Yeah. “Move back and forth into the change.” And then, it is this very kind of grand – you're the bell, and then it gets super personal. What is it – and the music changes, obviously, right? The whole thing can't be bells?

PH  Right.

JS  So, what is it like? And here is an example, I'm just looking at the meter changes here. And I write to the flow of the natural spoken text, (conducting and speaking in the rhythm) “What is it like? such intensity. What is it like such intensity of pain.” And I'm conducting, because I conduct a lot when I write, too. I feel the movement in my body. And so, sometimes when I make choices as to the meter, I make those choices because if I was conducting this, how would I want this to feel in my body? So I was like, “what is it…” you wanna look, can you see me?

PH  Mm-hmm (turning to look at the screen)

JS  Okay. So, (conducting and speaking text) “What is it like such intensity? What is it like such intensity of pain?” being on that note, that next downbeat. So that's a good example of that. But musically, it just [has] close harmony, it gets very intimate, quiet. And then it opens up again, “If the drink is bitter, turn yourself…” Oh! “In This Uncontainable Night!” And so, this to me, this piece is the counterpart for the caregiver to Number 6, to the “Sundowning” piece.

PH  Okay.

JS  And you know, I haven't thought about it that way. I mean I'm just getting some distance and looking at it. I really do feel like it's the partner to it. It's interesting they both start with bell sounds. Although, it's a clock in Number 6, and this is a bell tower, but these are big bells.
PH     (laughing)

JS     But, it's about this uncontainable night. Is there meaning? What is the meaning discovered there? "And if the world has ceased to hear you, say to the silent earth: I flow. To the water, speak: I am." I am still here.

PH     Mm-hmm.

JS     People who would have abandoned me, friends, everybody? I am still here. I flow, I am still making sense of this experience. And speaking of Number 6, this is not happening in a regular fashion, but I talked about Sean Nevins poetry and how powerful it was. That piece, both in terms of setting it, renting the original lead sheet to it and orchestrating it, for me was the most intense experience. The poetry was so important. It was so helpful. I mentioned at the beginning of this interview about how Andrea Gillies book talked about, in one word, the whole Alzheimer's experience: “misery”?

PH     Mm-hmm.

JS     And, Number 6 definitely speaks to that, as does Number 10. Not in the same ‘in your face’ images emotionally to that misery. But, oh my God, the whole…and this speaks to your question about style, right?

PH     Yeah.

JS     I don't think of myself as being a – what's the term – oh crap, I'm having a brain fart. Now what's the word Paul, you know, like if you're writing about a spring day in a meadow, it's – there's a word for it. That programmatic, there's another word, it's specific to composition. I can't think of it right now. At any rate –

PH     Are you sure it’s not programmatic?

JS     Well, it could be. Well, this piece is pretty programmatic, actually. But there were a couple images that just… oh, oh! There are a couple things I want to point out about this piece. May we go back for a second? The whole opening, as you know, is very out of time. And the singer actually starts off beat.

PH     Right.

JS     But by the time he gets to, (singing) “one night with all this wondering…” that becomes a feeling in somewhat of a meter, even though the undercurrent is still totally out of time.

PH     Mm-hmm.

JS     When I set this, and I think I mentioned in the last interview, I was like, “Oh my God! I love this poem. How the hell am I going to set this, right?” So, the opening really had a feeling, even though I love the opening, like a recitative.
JS That's kind of how I approached it to begin with. And then, when the soprano comes in at letter A, she's (singing) “Each Evening,” she is kind of echoing, intervallic relationships that were in the first part in the tenor solo. When she gets to, and it is still out of time, poco piu mosso at 36, it goes into a feeling of meter and it's important for everyone to feel that there (speaking the text in meter and conducting). “To step from its wreckage as from a robe dropped to the floor.” But at any rate, it has. And the accompaniment, too, becomes regular, (imitating instruments) dum, bap, ba, tchung, da… and there is a sense of relaxation.

JS But then she goes on, “Each evening the struggle to ditch this disguise and body,” etc…. God, I love this poem. “This jerry-built cage of bones that hold,” this line, I swear to God, this line just seared through me. “This jerry-built cage of bones that holds you like the rescued starling, disconsolate and thrashing against its cardboard box.”

JS You know what, that's exactly what you hear. You hear that thrashing. The whole next section, obviously, is the thrashing.

PH It's unsettled, yeah.

JS The orchestral interlude, right?

PH Right.

JS Then, this next section is so interesting. Like I said, I'm very intuitive, but sometimes when I look back on a piece, especially smaller pieces that I've written, oh my God, sometimes it is like something happens and it's magic.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS “Sundowning,” this kind of relates somewhat to Number 3, “Memory Aids,” in that we have orchestration, and it's out of time, all over the place, thrashing around. And then, (clapping with eyes shut agitated-like) which is like “Memory Aids.”

PH Mm-hmm.

JS (chanting text) “This is the time, ta ta, ta, ta…” this section is about that blue persistence telling you that I have to be here – but in this instance, you're demented.

PH Mm-hmm.
It's not a real thing. It's not the toast and the coffee. It's having to go to work even though you haven’t had a job. But it is still that same (pounding fist grunting on tempo) feeling that's driving underneath it. But seriously, when I was writing this piece, every time I got to this line, I just cried, I just wept. It's the person, the speaker in the poem is the care partner speaking about this person, right?

But you know I haven't understood that it is like, “The living room drapes are engulfed in flame in the whole damn house of mind is burning down around you, and the walls are all swallowing the doors.” It is no escape. It is like the starling. But this is even more profound, you know. I mean it is wrenching.

It's interesting to watch you go through the motions all over again, like they're fresh and new. It brings it alive to me when you do that.

Well, you know, this is good for me because, I think I mentioned to you, I really do need to write a reduced-force version of this because this is an important — this is important for people to hear and to sing it and to feel. And, if having a 30-piece orchestra gets in the way, which of course it does. I mean, no honestly. That is on purpose. That's a conscious choice, you know. You can't stay in that place; however, you are going to comment on it. I'm going to give you three more words; heart break, stress, resilience, right?

And then this piece — oh, I wanted to say something again, because you are giving notes to conductors about this piece. The directives in this piece are real. I don't use a lot of directives, honestly. It's funny. I use a lot of tempo markings, but I don't tell you how to feel, or how it should feel because I feel like if it is written well, it should feel that way. Do you know what I'm saying?

However, in this instance, unhurried. Well, what does that mean? Does that mean rubato? What does that mean? It just means that often time singers see dotted rhythms and they go over the top, or they don't.

Either they’re not precise or they're too precise. This piece is about those dotted rhythms landing in the right place. So, in this instance, if I was doing this with my amateur choir of unauditioned singers, they would totally cheat that second eighth rest. “There are moments when you have it,” (Singing two different rhythms) “there are moments when you have it,” you know what I mean? So, what I mean by unhurried — you really feel the rests. Let those rests have their
PH Full value.

JS And I'm glad I brought this up because this is something I haven't thought about in a while, but it is really true about my writing. You hear people give lip service to this all the time, but space – I mean time. What is music? It is sound in time. But we tend to focus on the sound and not the empty places. And it's the empty places that are so frigging important.

PH Yes.

JS So, when I said legato, unhurried, honestly, that's just another way of saying, “please observe the rests and give them their full value.” And again, if it's written well, it won't feel hurried. Right?

PH That sounds conversational.

JS Yeah. (singing) “When you have a choice,” I'm always telling my singers about short notes. Oh my God, what happens to short notes? They lose resonance. They go back (gesturing to back of throat) and then, the “fall apart” (singing forward) not “fall apart” (throwing it back) Dotted rhythms, we tend to think like this, with a short note being back, and it should be, “Da (pause) ya da” is how they should be, those 16th rhythms. So, this next section – and I’m pretty specific – it does go faster. But it's like flowing easily, without accents on the down of the beat, which unfortunately in the premiere it still happened, because we are human and we're musical creatures, and when we see something on a downbeat, we just give it even more stress, even though it has its own natural stress. Every beat, every pulse that's on the (gesturing steady beat) has plenty of weight already.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS So in this instance, I say “without accent.” I would almost dare to say “unaccented” on the down of the beat. Because that way it will flow. The other thing is that don't be, (singing and playing a basic syncopated rhythm with hands and singing the notes) that would be, (singing again more accented) but I didn’t want to write it as triplets either, because that's not right either.

PH Right.

JS (singing legato) That's not right. It's in between there. (Singing legato with the right rhythm) It's about that unhurriedness.

PH Mm-hmm. So, it's like almost giving the 16th notes a little bit more time, but without slowing the measured feeling. It's not a rubato. I wouldn't put a ritard in there, and a lot of conductors would do that. (Singing and slowing down at the end of the phrase.) I can get more morose by slowing it down even more, you know what I’m saying? I mentioned this before, rhythm is like my thing. And time is my thing. I mean, rhythm and line. That’s me. Those are my focal points. Why I'm so precise about time, because I believe that time and tempo are underrepresented expressive element[s] in music.
PH Hmm.

JS I am not talking about the ubiquitous ritard at the end of – I am talking about (like this piece) putting meaning into a phrase by where the rests lie, where does the space lie? And “or take a deep breath,” That is a little bit obvious. And this thing, “take a deep breath on it,” this does not work. I would actually even get rid of that line.

PH Like you are almost sighing just a little bit.

JS But I think as a soloist that would work. I think maybe as a choral thing it might be a little bit too precious. But that is how I felt it because that's how I wrote it. That is how I felt it when I sang it because this was one of those pieces that was totally composed away from the piano, with my voice only.

PH Wow.

JS So, that is why that line is in there, because it's just a very vocal thing. Okay, I could go on and on about timing. And then [the] expression of time. So, here we have this flowy thing, you are lonely. It's a descending line, and then you get into – oh, I do have a directive ‘with gentle conviction.’ And GENTLE conviction. Not (puffed and loud) “and a new strength.”

PH Right.

JS But bowing through those long notes like you are a string orchestra (gesturing like bowing a cello) “and new” with the up bow on “new strength.”

PH Mm-hmm.

JS Okay. And then you asked about themes or motifs, obviously this is one of the motifs.

PH Right. Let me tell you some of the things I've found, and then you can confirm or deny. So let me see, obviously the “Tango.”

JS The bass line is the connective tissue. It is a signal for narration also. It is a cue. It almost works more as a cue than anything.

PH Right. Then, yes this, (singing a descending line) “Dee, Dee, Dee, Dee…” that comes back in another place —

JS That comes back before Number 15, “I Sing to You.”

PH Right. Then – I wish I had made just a list.

JS Yes, I got one here, let me tell you. (Laughing)

PH (Singing a phrase) Number 5.
JS That is before Number 5. Let me tell you about that line. That was the very first thing that I composed.

PH Really?

JS I was just thinking how it was just one of the feelings that I had. Obviously it's an introduction because what follows it is the “last night in my bed.” It is the opening to that. And I think that it ends with that too. But that melody was the very first thing I composed before I had my libretto, before I had anything. And I think I mentioned to you, I am very wary of writing music before I see the text, but that the only thing that was written before any text or knowledge of what the piece was going to be in its entirety. And that does come back. That comes back before, “Just Hold Hands.” And it is appropriate because they're both love songs.

PH Right. That's what I'm calling it. I'm glad you confirmed that! I’m calling it a “love theme,” or “love motif.” Because it happens in the “Song of Solomon,” and then the “Holding Hands” theme.

JS It is the love motif, right.

PH Right, okay. Any other things, bits that I –

JS Well, the loneliness motif. It is in, “A Choice,” I keep calling that piece, “A Choice.” It is a lonely feeling. It is a kind of going downhill – lonely feeling. But it is about being cut off. What is loneliness? Being cut off. But when it comes back, it is about being connected, because it comes back, and it gets transformed. Just like it was this feeling of being lonely and disconnected, but it turns into, (singing) “I Sing to You.”

PH I almost see it not as sort of a ‘fake strength’ but more of a calm resolve in a way, like we are going to make it. It is not going to be pretty, but we are going to make it. We are going to go through this, and –

JS Well, you know that the little tail at the end, (singing) ya, da, da, da, da, it ends up going up, right?

JS Right? And just then, I can't remember if I mentioned this to you before, but perhaps I did, “I Sing to You,” when I started setting that, I was setting it along the harmonic progression of “You Are My Sunshine.” And it has those cheesy, chromatic – but again, speaking of style, I do not generally write like that. I mean, I can –

PH No, I know. But everybody in my choir said that makes me think of 40s or 50s –

JS Exactly, bingo.

PH – music that those people might have listened to. So, you did it right. They didn't think of it as cheesy, they said that was what my grandparents would have listened to.
JS Right, that was a very direct, stylistic choice that I made to get across what was going to happen after that.

PH Because you do not really stay there long, and then you go on to different things. Then you insert the “You are my Sunshine.” And I just love this almost minimalistic “Love Bears All” – keeps going and going and doesn't stop.

JS That, duh! Sometimes the simplest metaphor – well, see here is the thing, the melody is also very – simple [but it] does not mean simplistic. It is constant. It does not change. And it is very important. Oh see, it says misura, steady throughout, senza ritard – it is very even to the very end – bitter end. There should be no change in tempo. Strict, strict tempo, because (flipping through pages). Remember I was just saying about time? So, important here at the end. To me, one of the most – I mean it is emotional, at letter E. It never does come in on the downbeat. It comes on the two. (Gesturing)

PH Mm-hmm.

JS (singing) “Never.” It just has this feeling to it. It is not a (loud singing) “Never,” you know. It is uplifting. Because it is on the end of the meter, at the back end of the bar. Again, the timing is so important in this space. There is an extra, I'll call it the ‘big beat,’ because what are we in, 6/8, 9/8?

PH Mm-hmm.

JS There is an extra pulse in there, (conducting and snapping) and there it is – “fails.” So, no ritard. Be careful with that. You know what I am saying? It is like I want to experience it. And maybe I'll get what you've done, and maybe I won't even know how the hell you achieved – how you were able to get that feeling from me from what you did.

PH Mm-hmm.

JS What I am getting at is that this piece, for me as a composer, satisfied a lot of things. It satisfied my joy in melody. It satisfied my absolute attention to text. Really getting in there and making sure that that is what comes forward.

PH Right.

JS It challenged me in ways that I had never been challenged before. Like I talked about “Sundowning.” That was one of the most challenging pieces I think I have ever set. It challenged me, the whole piece challenged me, and put me on a learning curve as far as orchestration was concerned. But really the way that is most satisfying to me, and is always the most satisfying to me, is that it opens people up.

PH Mm-hmm.
JS: That if I get a profound sensation, if I have a visceral response to my own music, then I think other people will. And that is a gauge that I use as I am writing.

PH: Right.

JS: I will never forget when Diane brought me down when they were preparing it for me to hear the choir and to give input. And it was the first time I heard people sing it. And it was kind of funny, I was like, “Oh my God, I love this! Oh, this is…” because you spend so much time by yourself doing this thing, and when you finally get to share it with the people who are going to bring it out in the world – it was really exhilarating and fun! And I was kind of laughing at myself for being so taken with the work but –

PH: It is great!

JS: And again, it is about what it does for people.

PH: That is great. That is good information. All right. Well, thank you again so much. It has really been lovely…

JS: I appreciate the opportunity. It was really – revisiting things I had forgotten, but it had been quite a bit of distance, so it was great to explore some of that stuff again with you.

PH: Thank you so much!

JS: You're welcome. Okay, bye.

PH: Bye bye.
Appendix B.

IRB Statement

IRBAM-21-1475 - IRB Review Not Required

Good Morning Dr. Henderson,

The IRB Chair reviewed your application and determined that IRB approval for this specific application (IRBAM-21-1475) is not needed. There is no manipulation of, nor intervention with, human subjects. As a result, consent is not required. Should you subsequently devise a project which does involve the use of human subjects, then IRB review and approval will be needed. Please include in your recruiting statements or intro to your survey that the IRB looked at the project and determined that it did not require a formal review, as it was deemed to be "not generalizable research."

You may still conduct your study. It falls under a certain category that does not require IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please let us know.

Best Regards,

Douglas Villien
Bibliography

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https://youtu.be/EQ88rO_OfaY


Vita

Paul Henderson, born in 1968 in Wichita, Kansas, has recently completed coursework for the Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting at Louisiana State University. He serves as the Associate Pastor of Music and Worship at Broadmoor Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He has previously served churches in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Paul holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Church Music from Oklahoma Baptist University and a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth Texas.